INSIDE THE BLUES

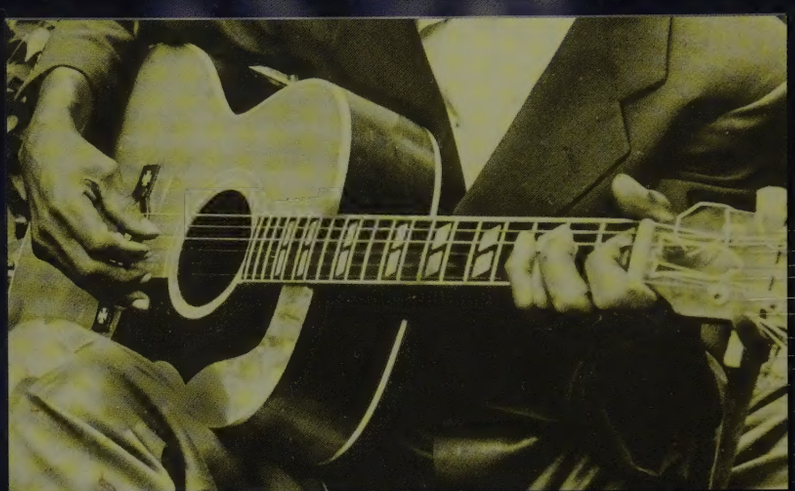
Acoustic Country Blues

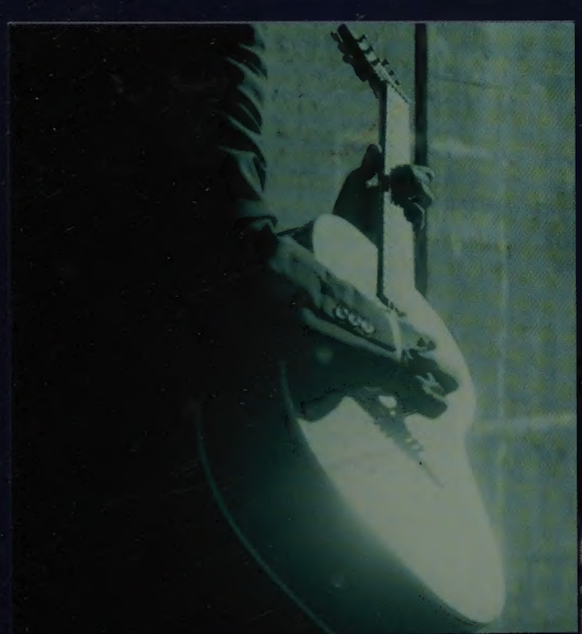
GUITAR

Delta Blues Before Robert Johnson

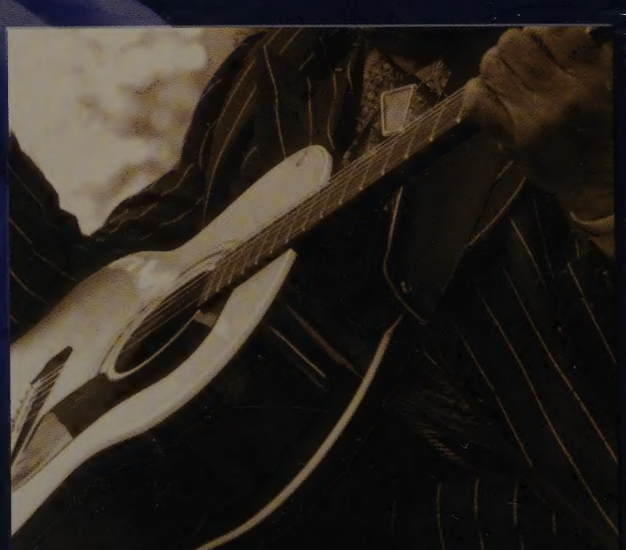
12 Songs from the Legends of the Mississippi Delta

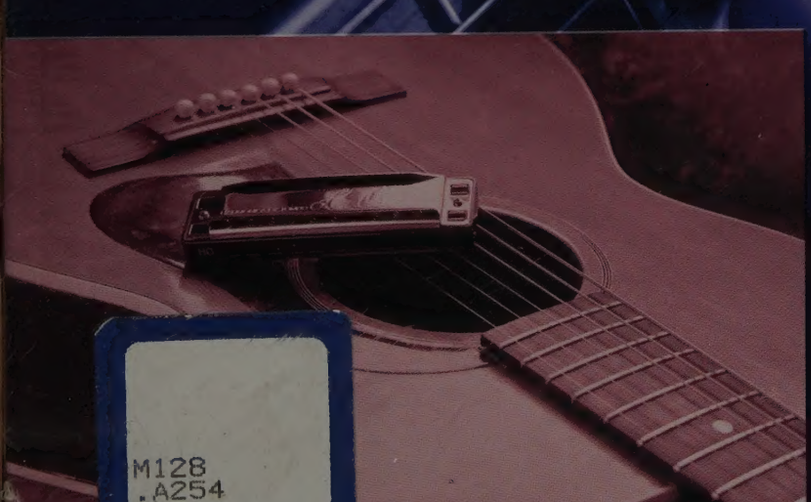
Includes Note-for-Note Transcriptions, Performance Notes, and Rare Photos





By Dave Rubin





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Acoustic Country Blues

GUITAR

Delta Blues Before Robert Johnson

CONTENTS

2 Acknowledgments
2 Preface
2 Introduction
2 Country Blues Guitar Techniques

4 **Skip James**—I'm Gonna Yola My Blues Away
13 **Blind Blake**—One Time Blues
19 **Son House**—My Black Mama
23 **Peetie Wheatstraw**—Police Station Blues
28 **Johnnie Temple**—Lead Pencil Blues
39 **Booker White**—Sleepy Man Blues
42 **Hambone Willie Newbern**—Roll and Tumble Blues
47 **Lonnie Johnson**—Life Saver Blues
53 **Charley Patton**—You Gonna Need Someone When You Die
58 **Calvin Frazier**—This Old World's in a Tangle
65 **Robert Johnson**—Cross Road Blues
73 **Robert Johnson**—I Believe I'll Dust My Broom

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PREFACE

There is a certain irony to the fact that, as we move into the next millennium, a great deal of attention has been focused on a Delta blues artist from the pre-World War II era. While technology races ahead like lightning, we still find ourselves transfixed with 29 records featuring a man and an acoustic guitar. How something so simple as a solo musician singing and playing into a microphone in makeshift studios in Texas in 1936 and 1937 could produce timeless music invites all sorts of speculation; how was it done?

The answer is multi-faceted. Robert Johnson was an extraordinary, talented individual with ambition and a vision. No country blues guitarist had more chops or the ability to focus them so intently towards getting a song across to their audience. Whether playing bottleneck or conventionally fretting his instrument, he combined lead, rhythm, and bass parts with remarkable skill and independence. In addition, Johnson was an expressive singer whose refined vocal mannerisms perfectly complemented his guitar voice.

The last piece of the puzzle was his intelligence. He was smart enough to use the phonograph as one of his primary learning sources, and the material he learned was the best his contemporaries had to offer. Continuing in the grand Delta tradition, he adapted and built upon the work of Charlie Patton, Son House, Lonnie Johnson, Skip James, Leroy Carr, and others. In the process he created his own great art while transcending his influences.

Presented in the following pages is a selection of the actual songs that inspired Johnson's compositions, plus two of his classics: "Cross Road Blues" and "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom." Along with providing insight into his music, they are a practical foundation for understanding and playing Delta blues.

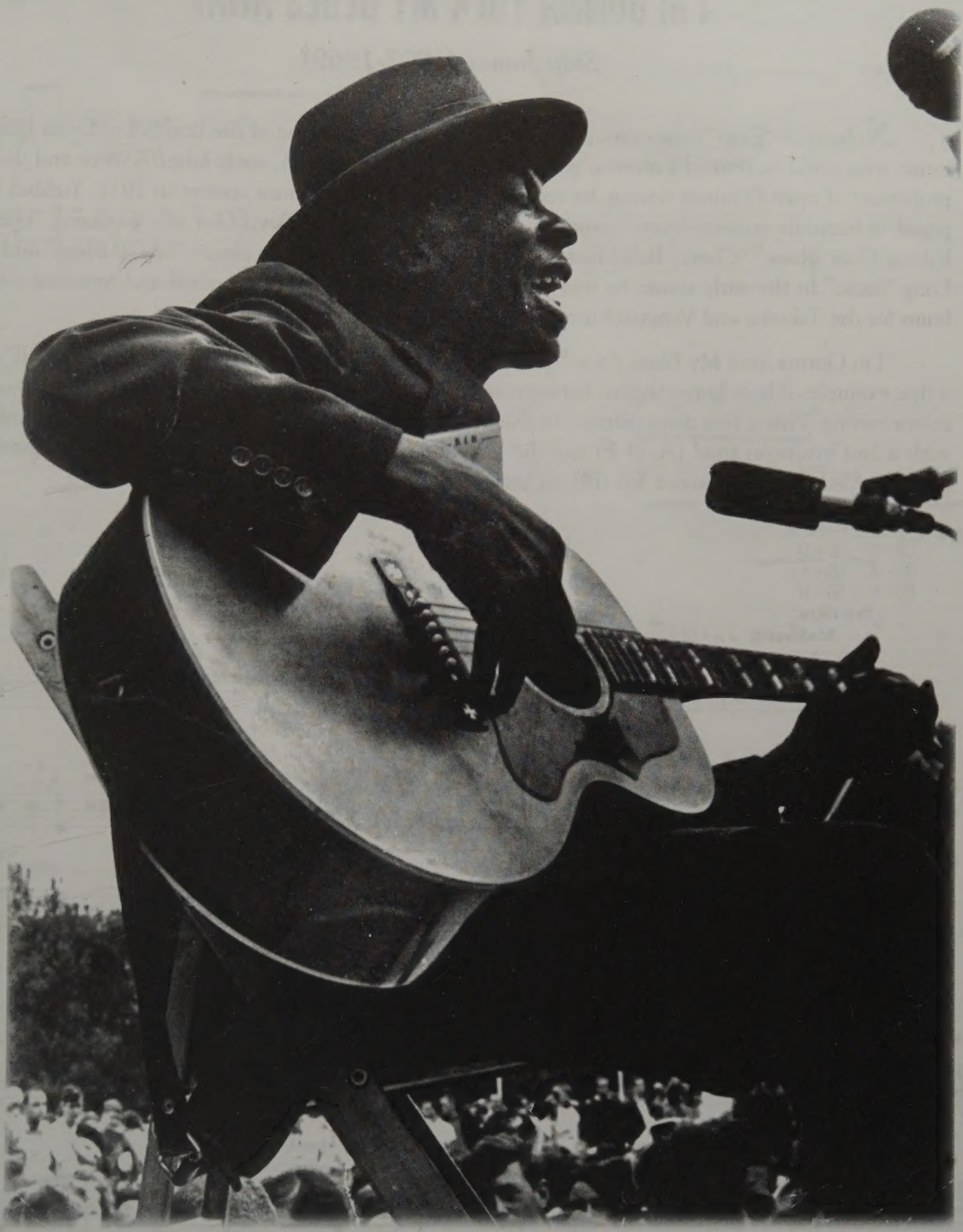
INTRODUCTION

Like Robert Johnson did over sixty years ago, you need to listen carefully to the music transcribed here in order to capture the nuances. While the blues basically consists of three chords (I–IV–V), there are an almost infinite number of ways to manipulate them within the genre. On top of that, you have the various methods of attacking the strings (bare fingers, flat pick, or fingerpicks), creating pitches (conventional fretting, bottleneck), and tuning (standard and open tunings). The legendary artists whose music lives on in recordings and the transcriptions contained within demonstrate all of these approaches.

COUNTRY BLUES GUITAR TECHNIQUES

All of the songs should be played fingerstyle with picks or bare fingers. Either way, the basic approach is to use the thumb for the bottom strings (the E, A, and D strings) and a combination of the index and middle fingers for the top three strings (the G, B, and E strings). Occasionally, when the thumb is not being used to maintain a pulse or pattern on the bottom strings, it can be employed to pick melody notes on the top strings like a flat pick.

You must wear the slide or bottleneck on the pinky finger in order to free the index, middle, and ring fingers for fretting and damping.



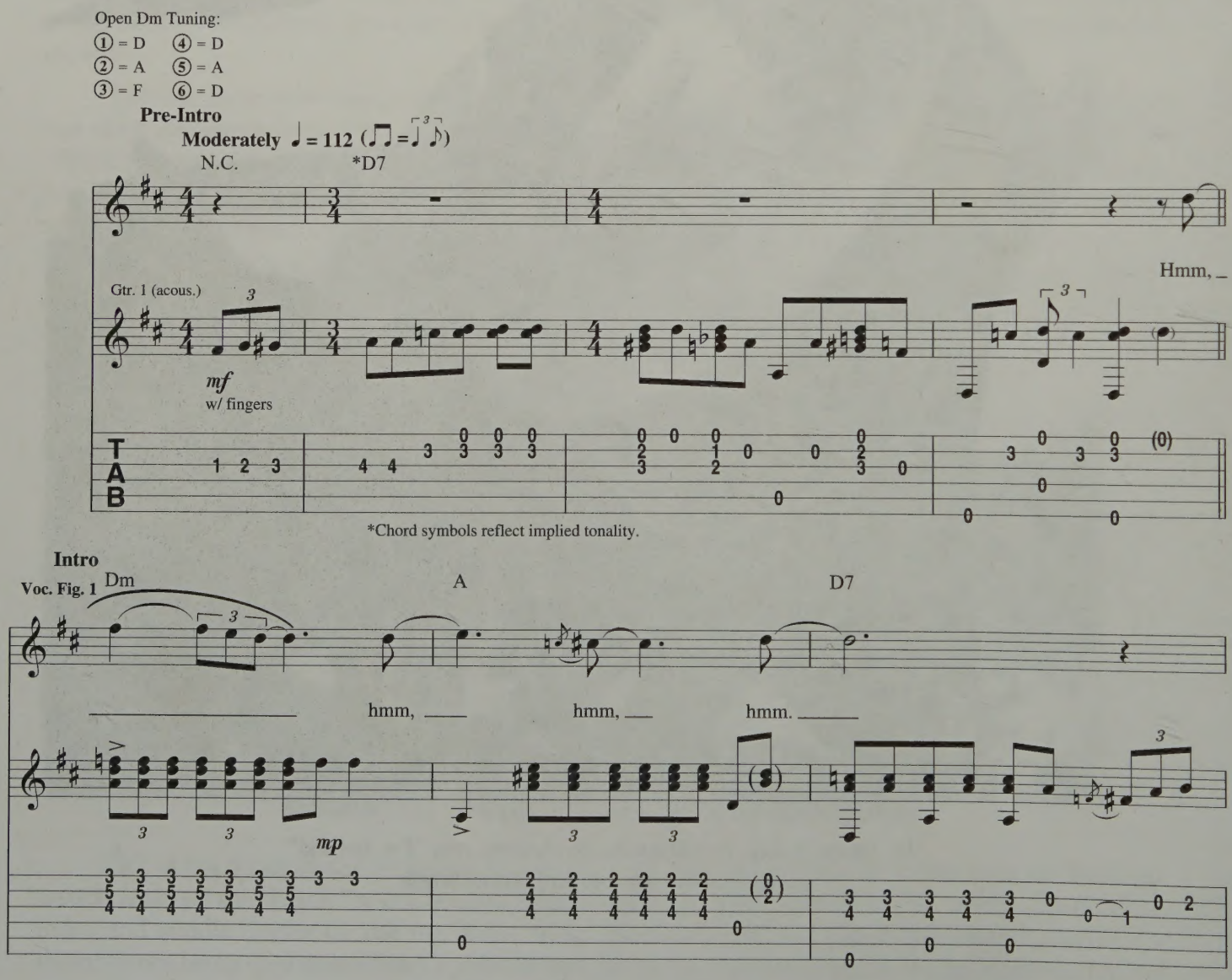
Skip James: A deep, brooding man, his children's song "I'm So Glad" was covered by Cream to his financial benefit

I'M GONNA YOLA MY BLUES AWAY

Skip James (1902-1969)

Nehemiah "Skip" James was, along with Robert Johnson, one of the handful of Delta blues guitarists who could be termed a musical genius. The possessor of a high, reedy falsetto voice and the main proponent of open D minor tuning, he recorded his famous Paramount session in 1931. Yielded were a passel of bonafide country blues classics, including the haunting "Devil Got My Woman," "Hardtime Killing Floor Blues," "Cherry Ball Blues," "I'm So Glad," and the piano pieces "22–20 Blues" and "How Long 'Buck." In the early sixties he was "rediscovered" during the Blues revival and recorded a few albums for the Takoma and Vanguard labels.

"I'm Gonna Yola My Blues Away" is the melodic precedent for "Hell Hound on My Trail" and is a fine example of how James shifted between major and "blues" (read minor) tonalities via his open D minor tuning. This is best demonstrated in the intro, where the D minor chord of measure 1 is indicated with a 2nd inversion triad (A–D–F) and the D7 chord in measure 3 is made major with a hammer-on from the ♭3rd (F) to the major 3rd (F♯) on beat 4.



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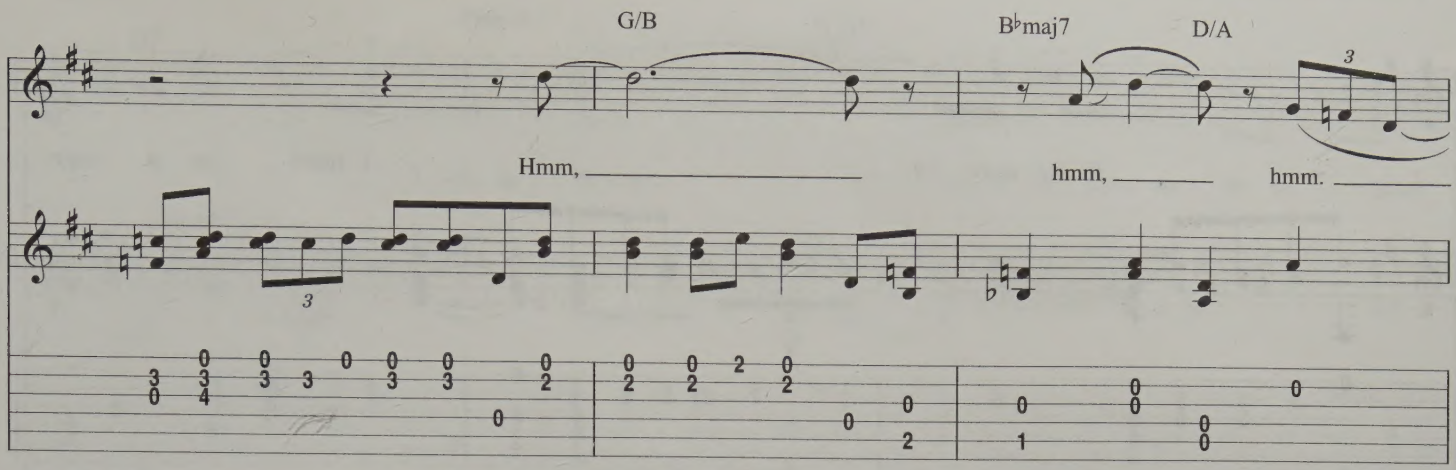
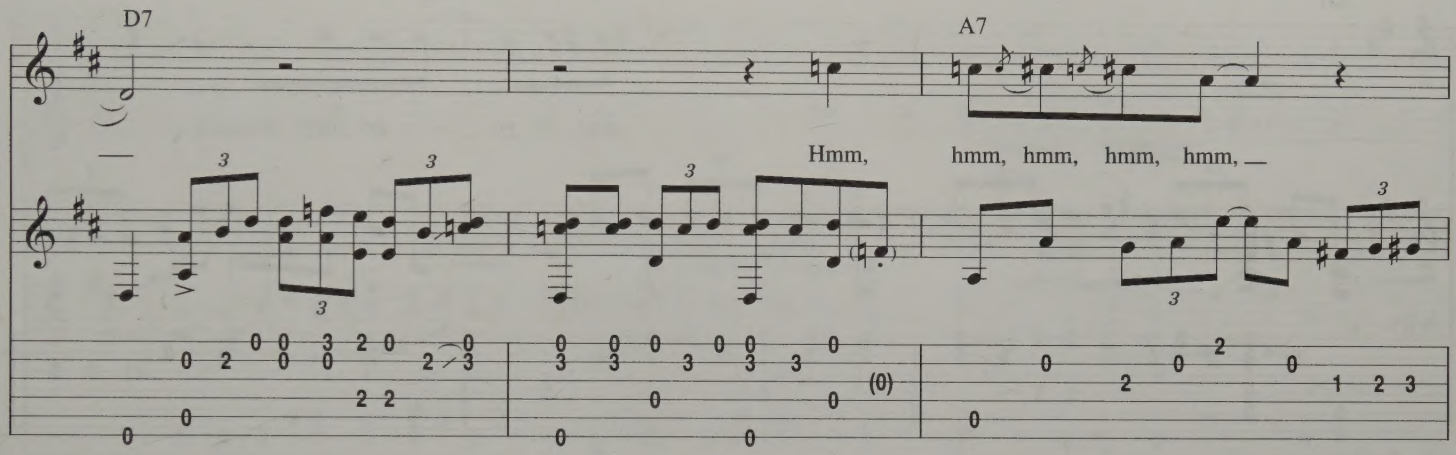
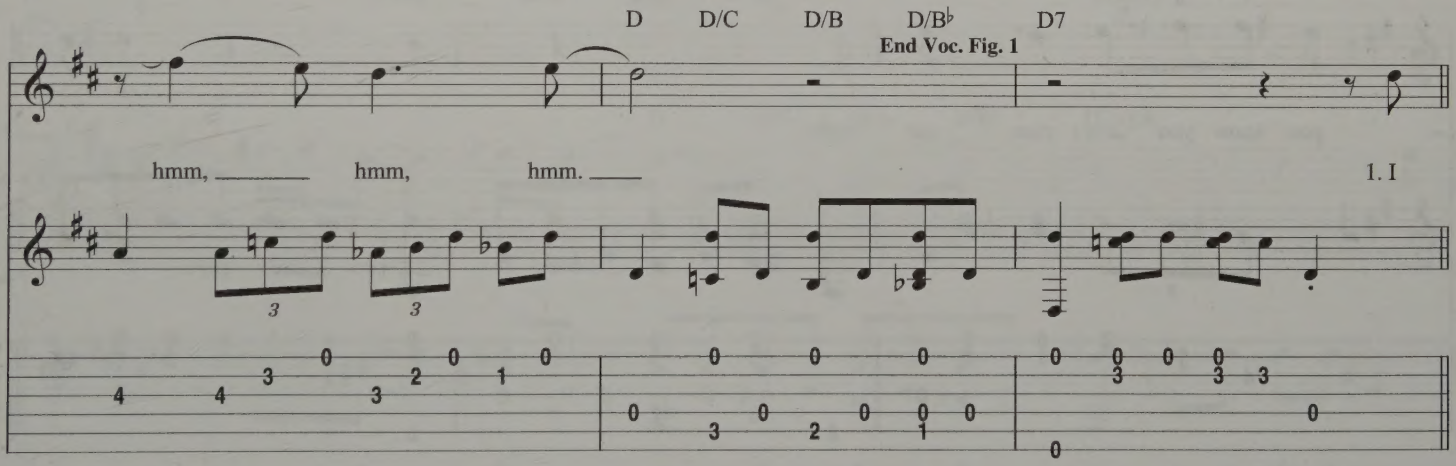
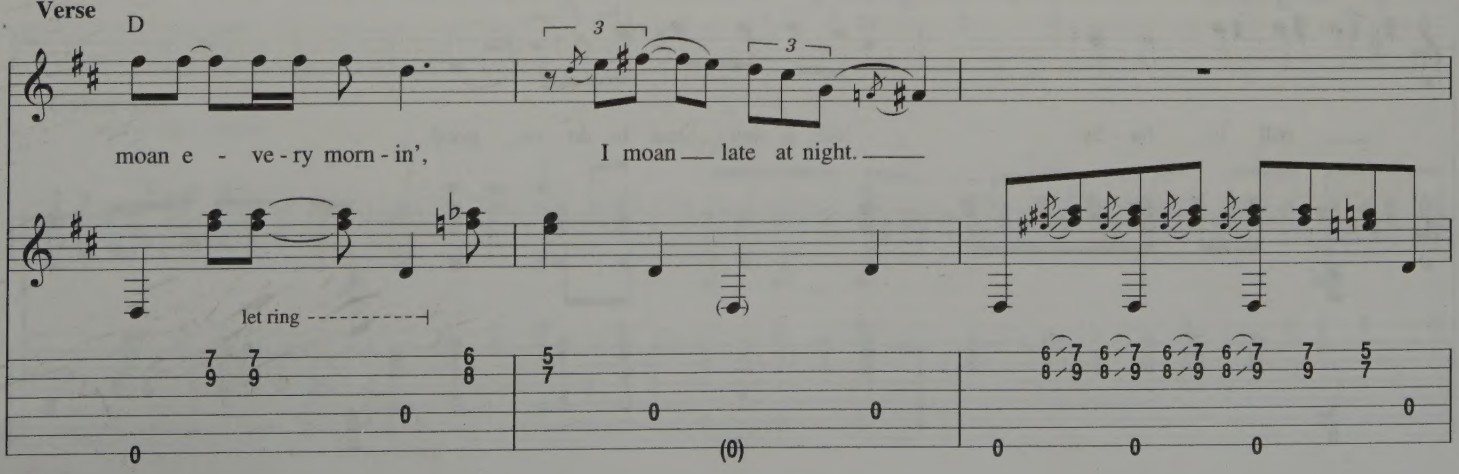
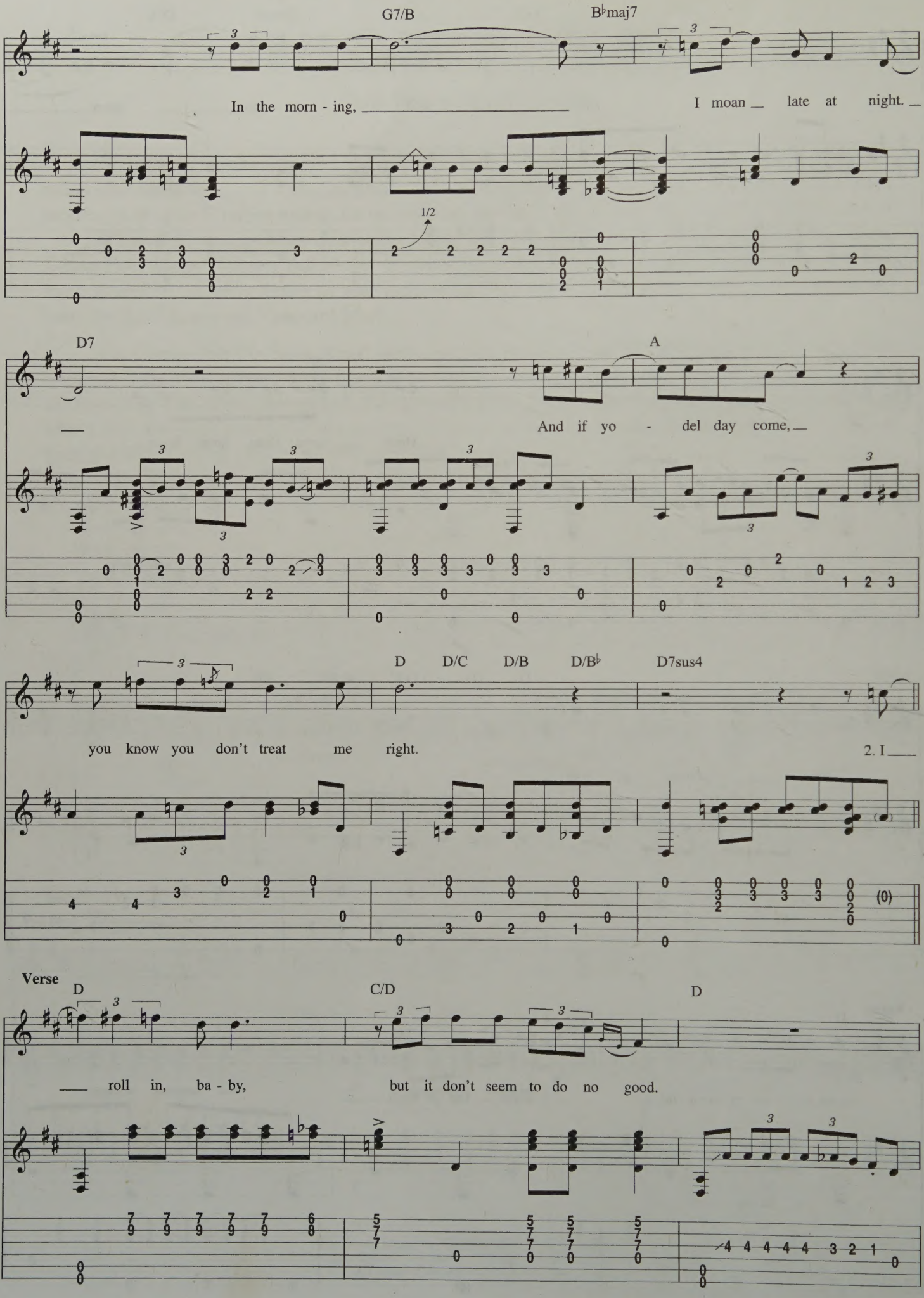
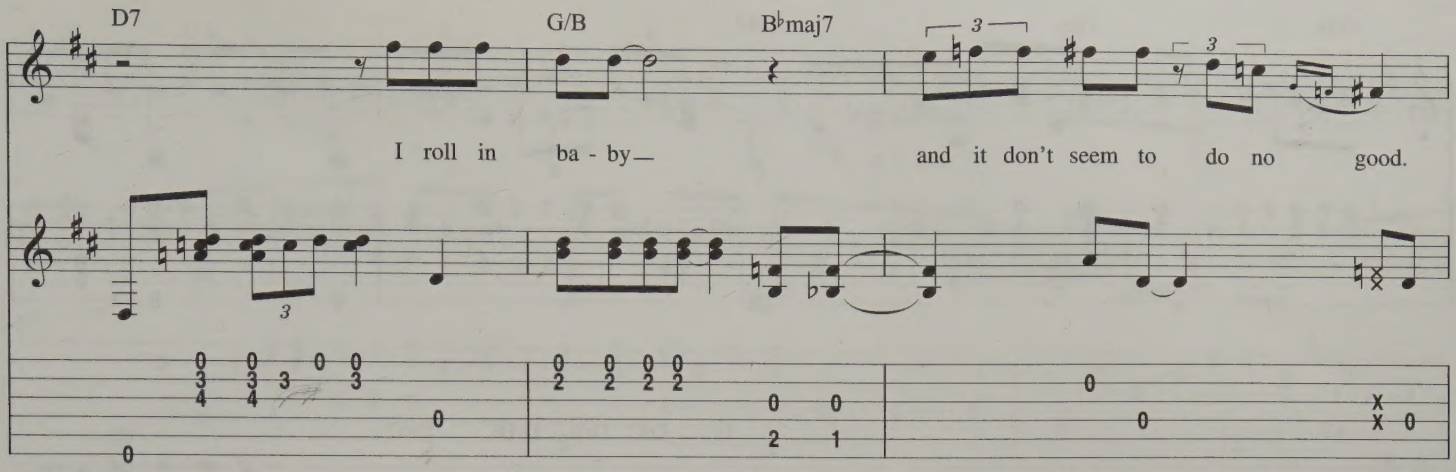

G/B
B♭maj7
D/A
Hmm,
hmm,
hmm.

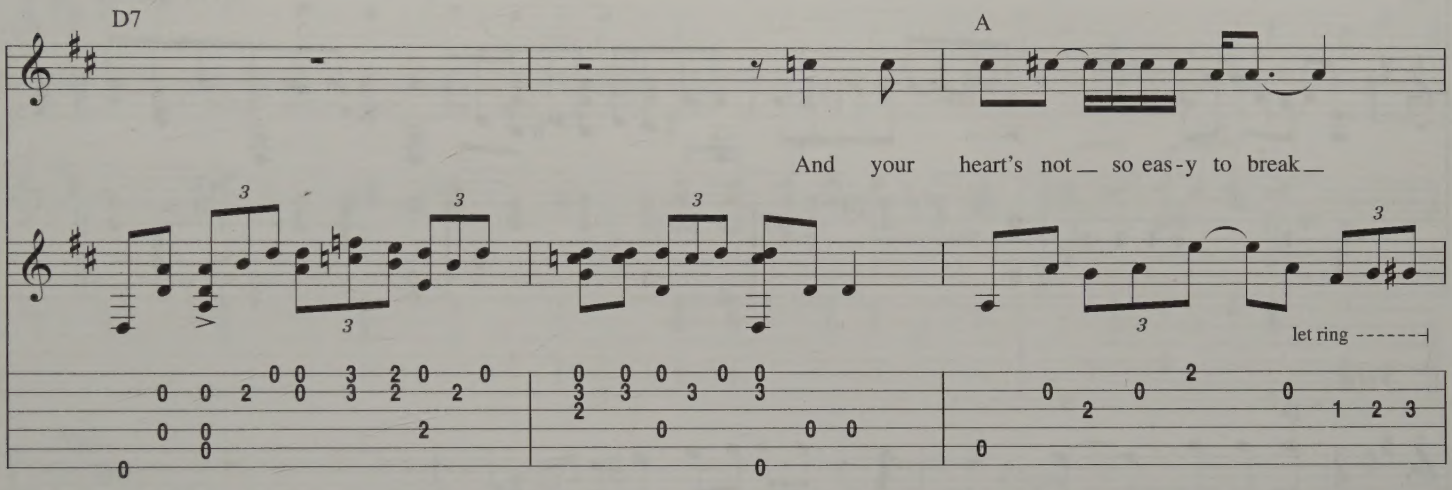

D7
A7
Hmm,
hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm,

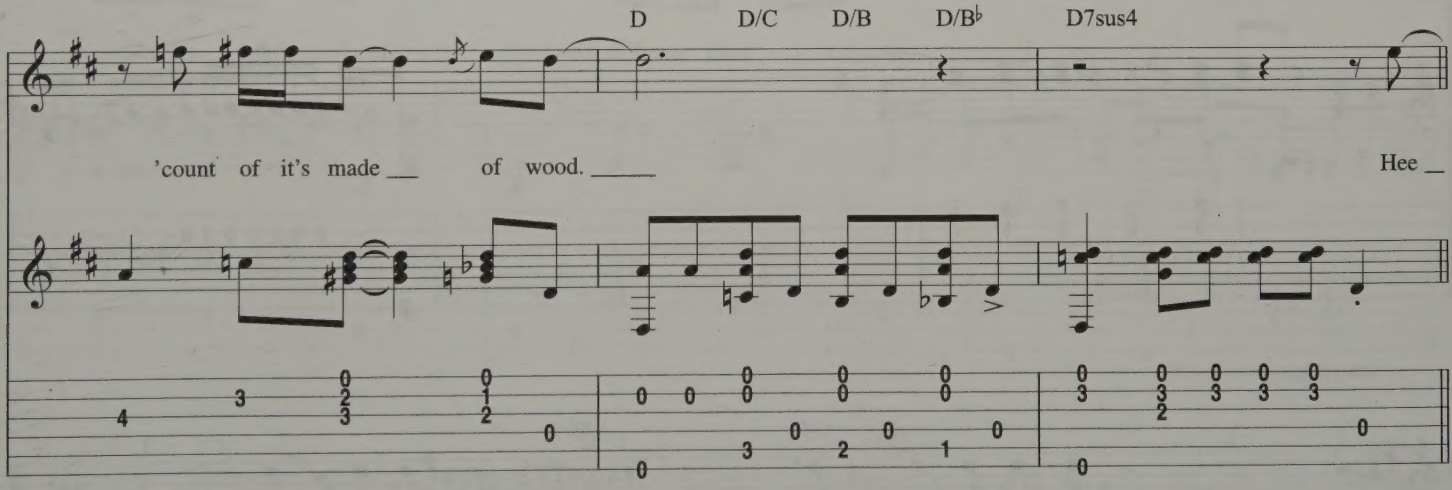

D
D/C
D/B
D/B♭
D7
End Voc. Fig. 1
hmm,
hmm,
hmm.
1. I


Verse
D
moan e - ve - ry morn - in',
I moan late at night.
let ring


G7/B
B♭maj7
In the morn - ing,
I moan late at night.
1/2
D7
A
And if yo - del day come,
D
D/C
D/B
D/B♭
D7sus4
you know you don't treat me right.
2. I
Verse
D
C/D
D
roll in, ba - by,
but it don't seem to do no good.

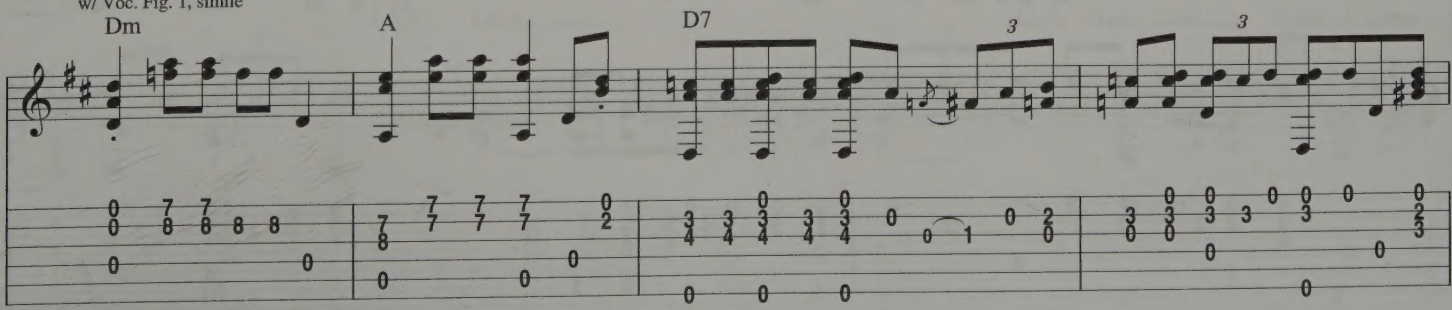


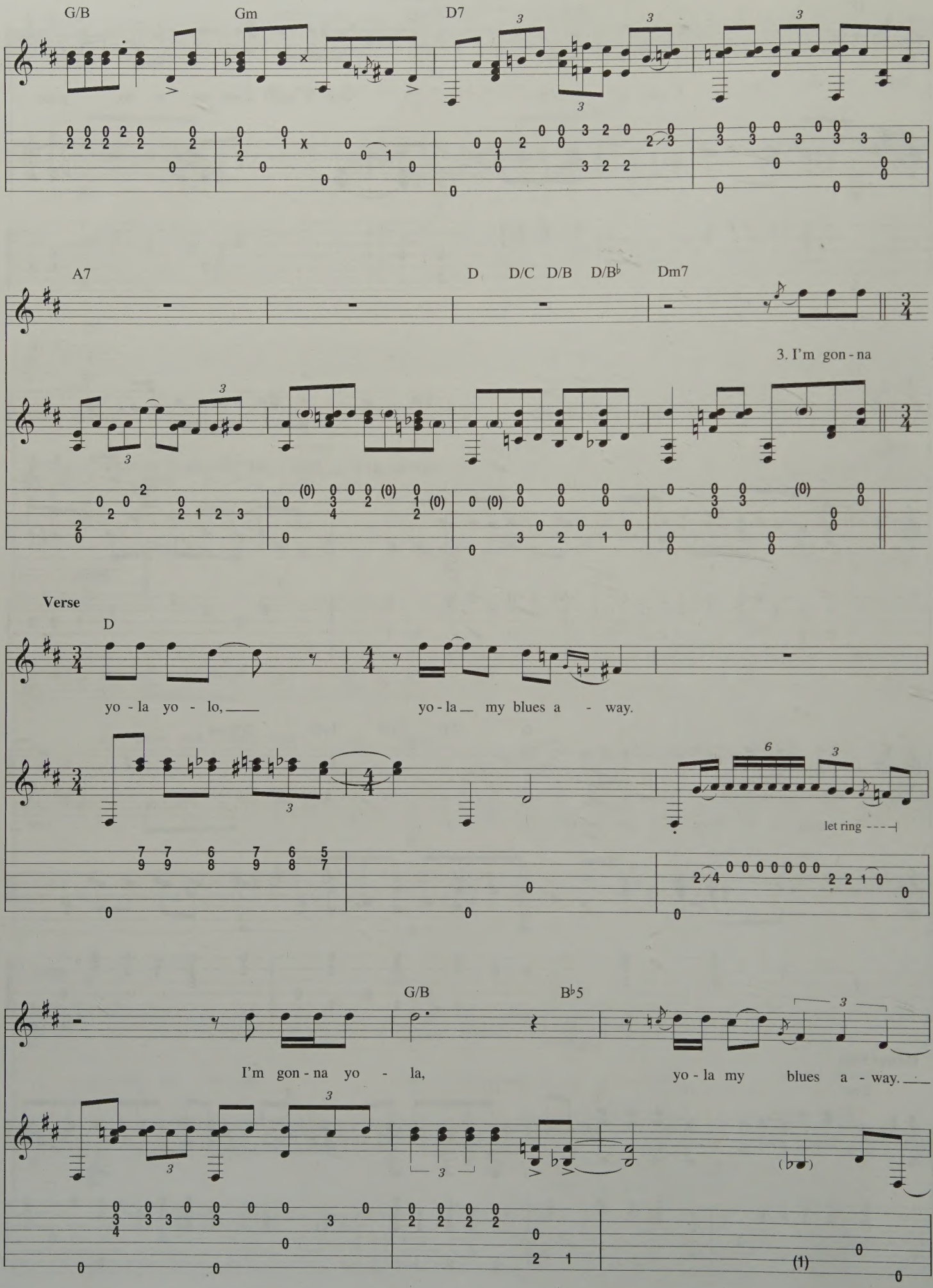


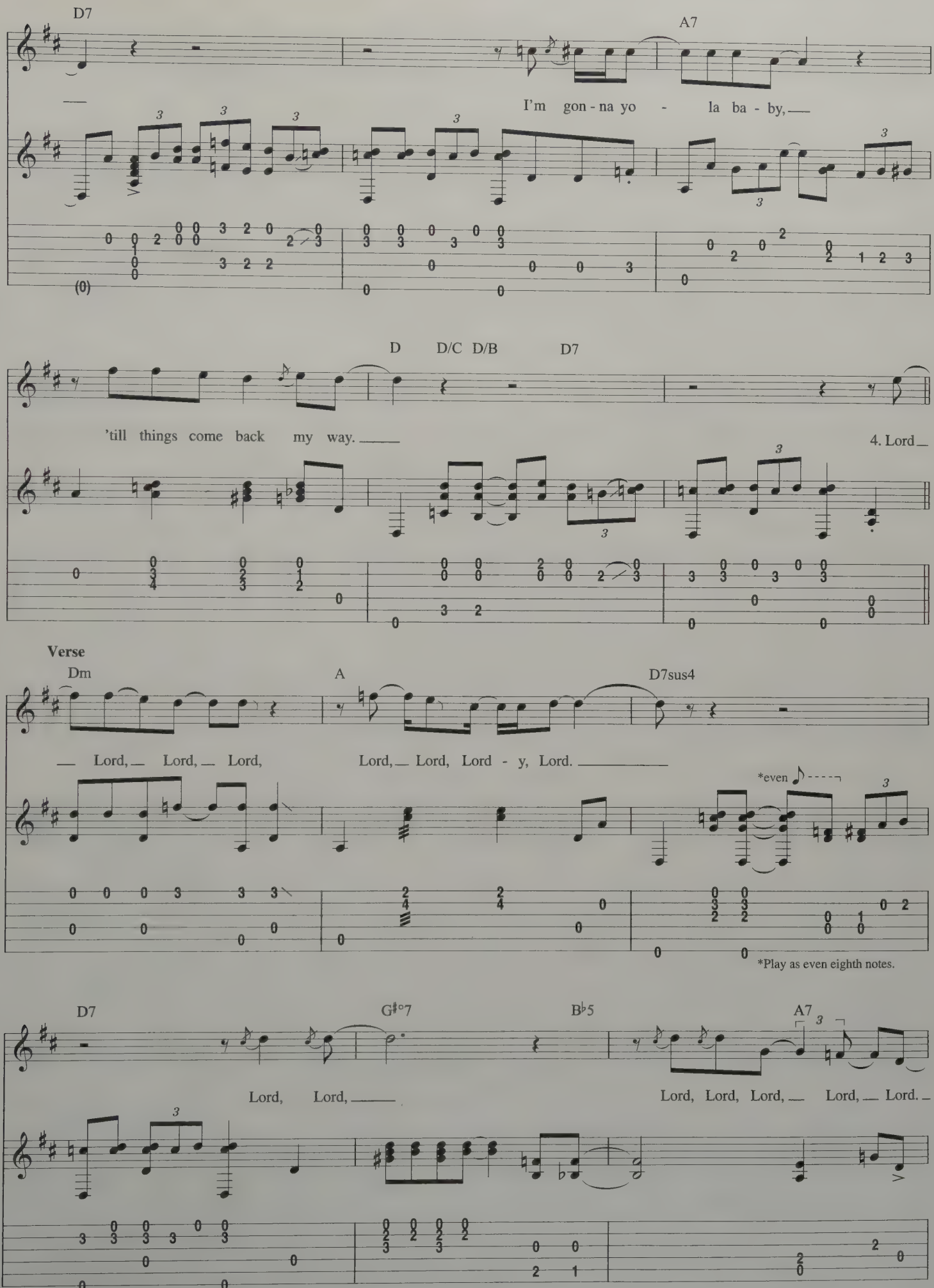


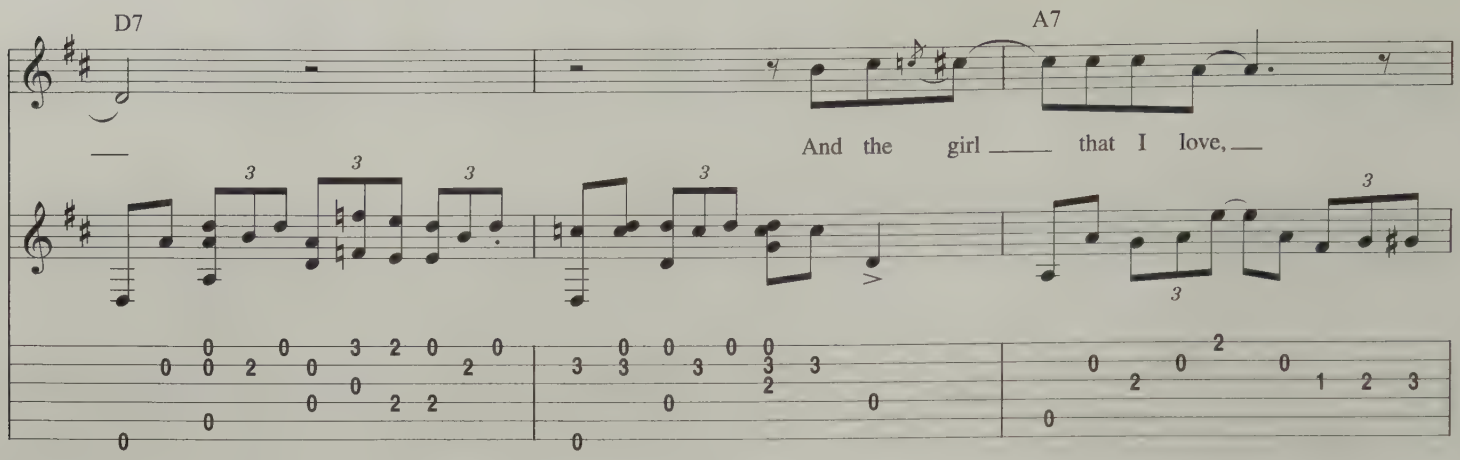
Guitar Solo

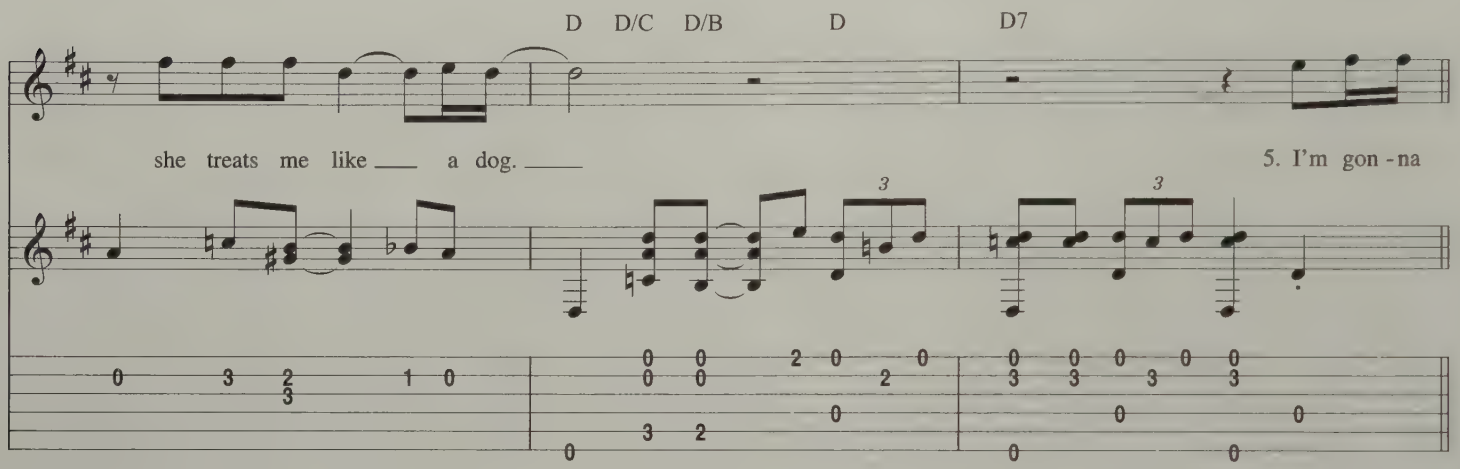
w/ Voc. Fig. 1, simile



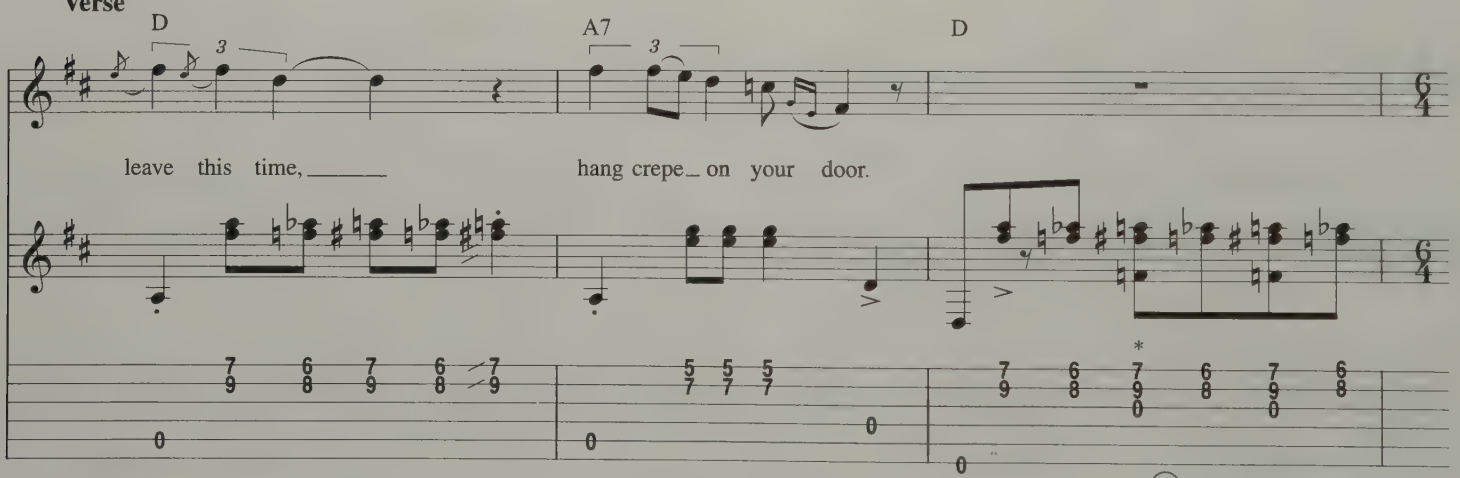

G/B
Gm
D7
A7
D
D/C
D/B
D/B♭
Dm7
3. I'm gon - na
Verse
D
yo - la yo - lo,
yo - la my blues a - way.
let ring
G/B
B♭5
I'm gon - na yo - la,
yo - la my blues a - way.


D7
A7
I'm gon - na yo - la ba - by,
D
D/C
D/B
D7
'till things come back my way.
4. Lord
Verse
Dm
A
D7sus4
Lord, Lord, Lord,
Lord, Lord, Lord - y, Lord.
*even
*Play as even eighth notes.
D7
G♯°7
B♭5
A7
Lord, Lord,
Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord.

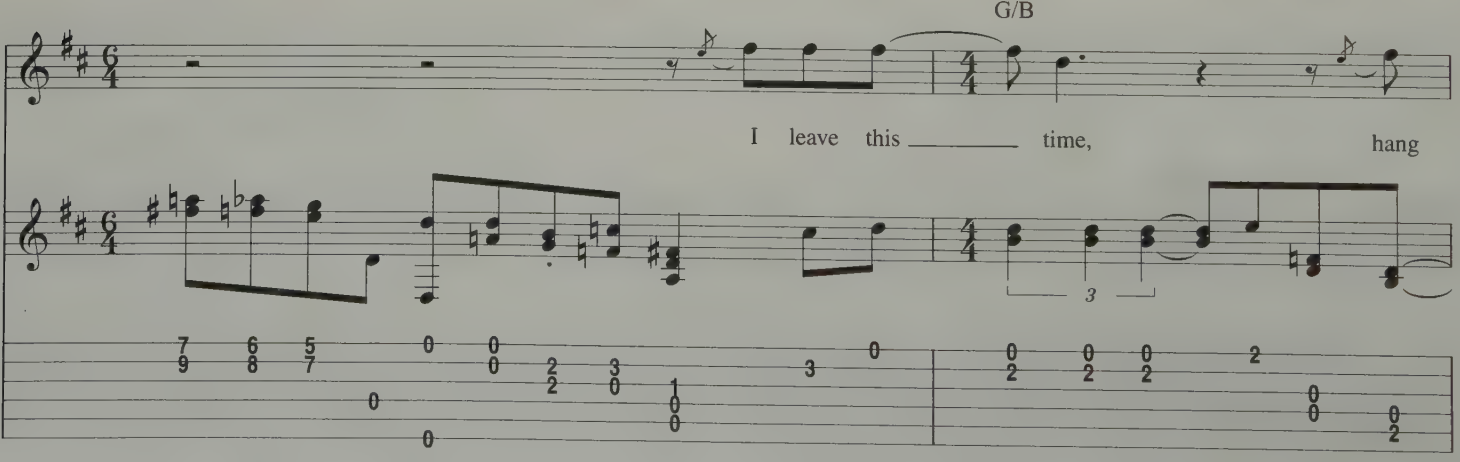


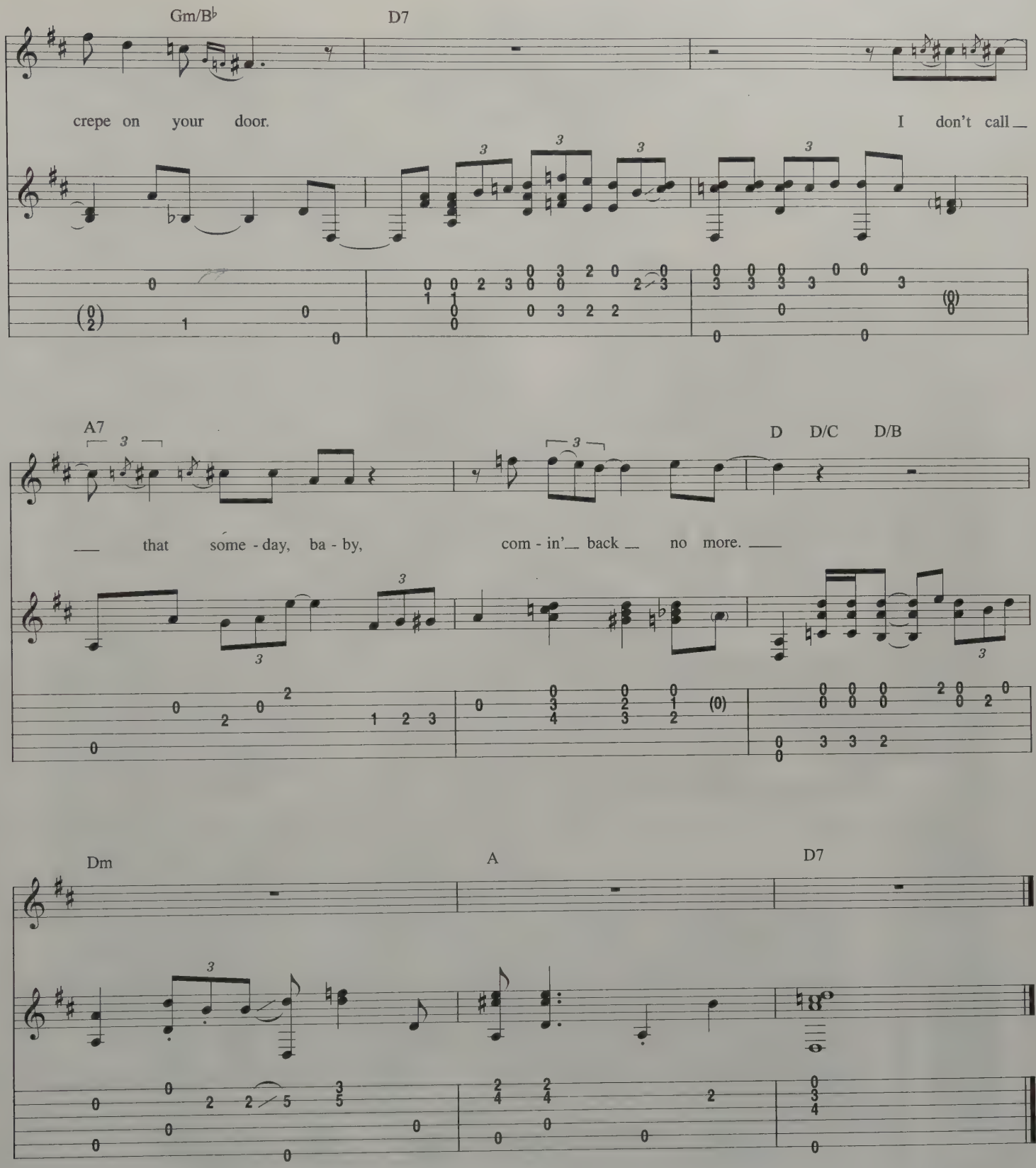


Verse



* (3) str. open probably not meant to be played.




Gm/B♭
D7
crepe on your door.
I don't call
A7
D
D/C
D/B
that some - day, ba - by,
com - in' back no more.
Dm
A
D7

Blind Blake: Blake's "raggy" blues contain viruosic picking that is still the benchmark for the genre.

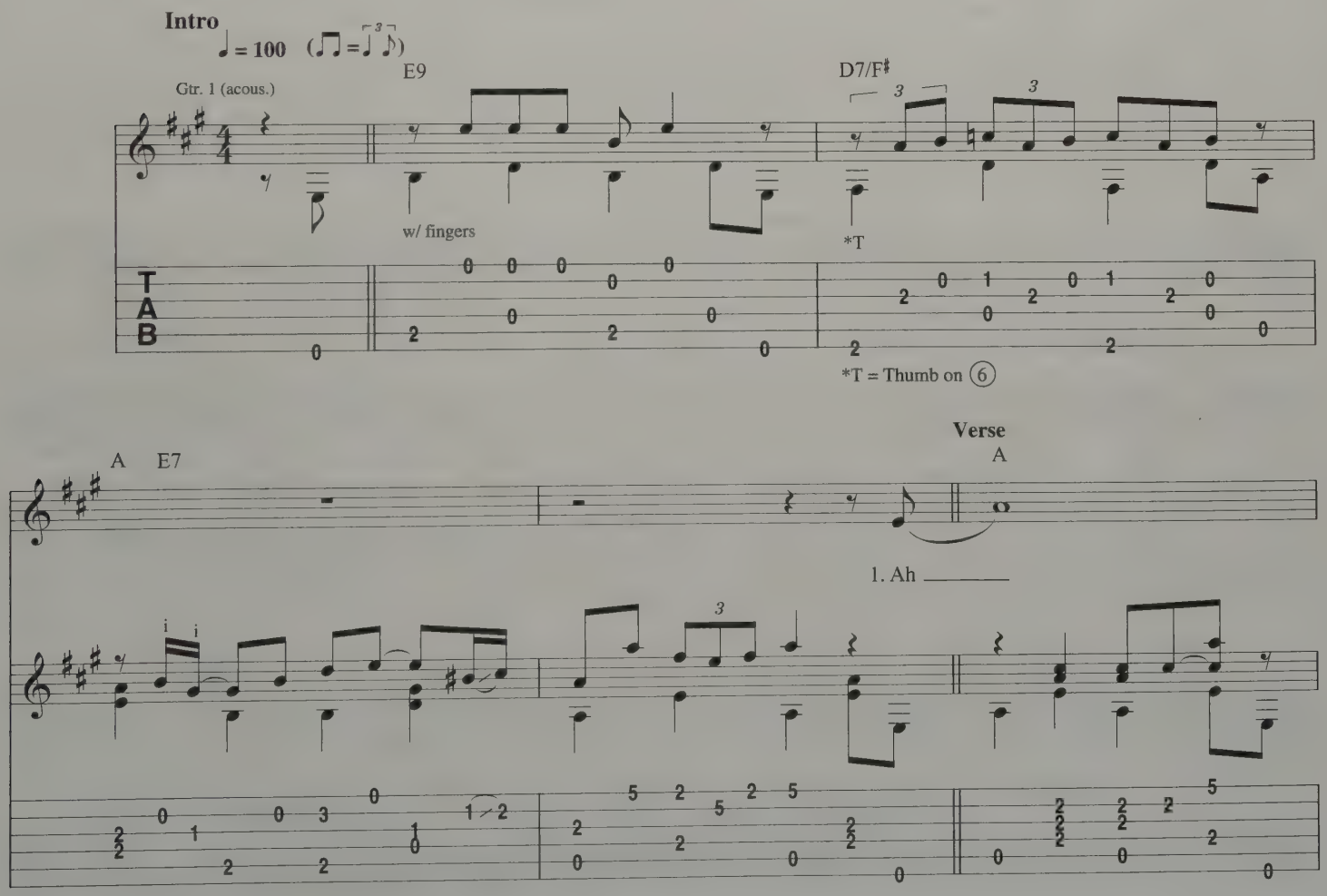
ONE TIME BLUES

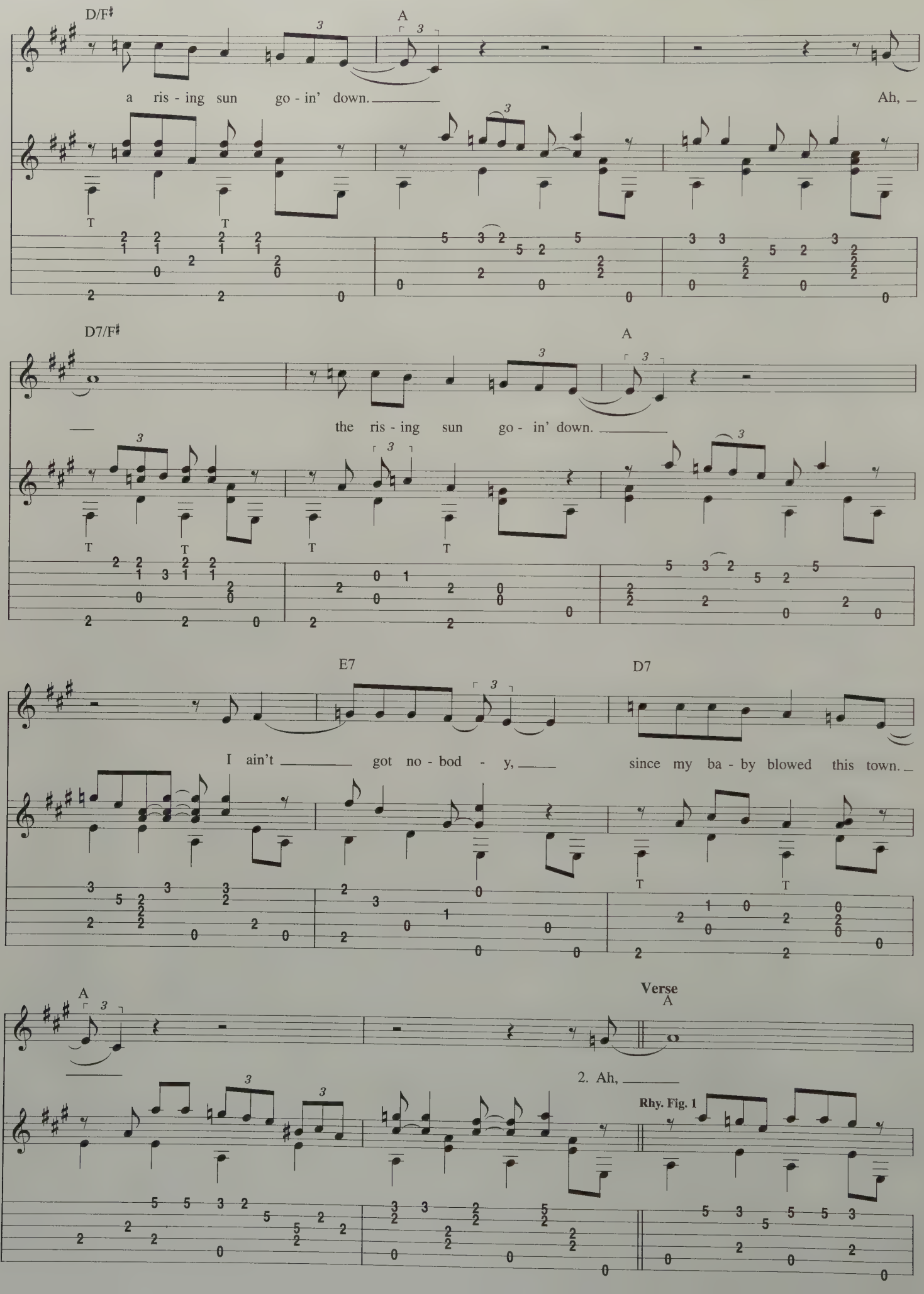
Blind Blake (c1890-95–c1933)

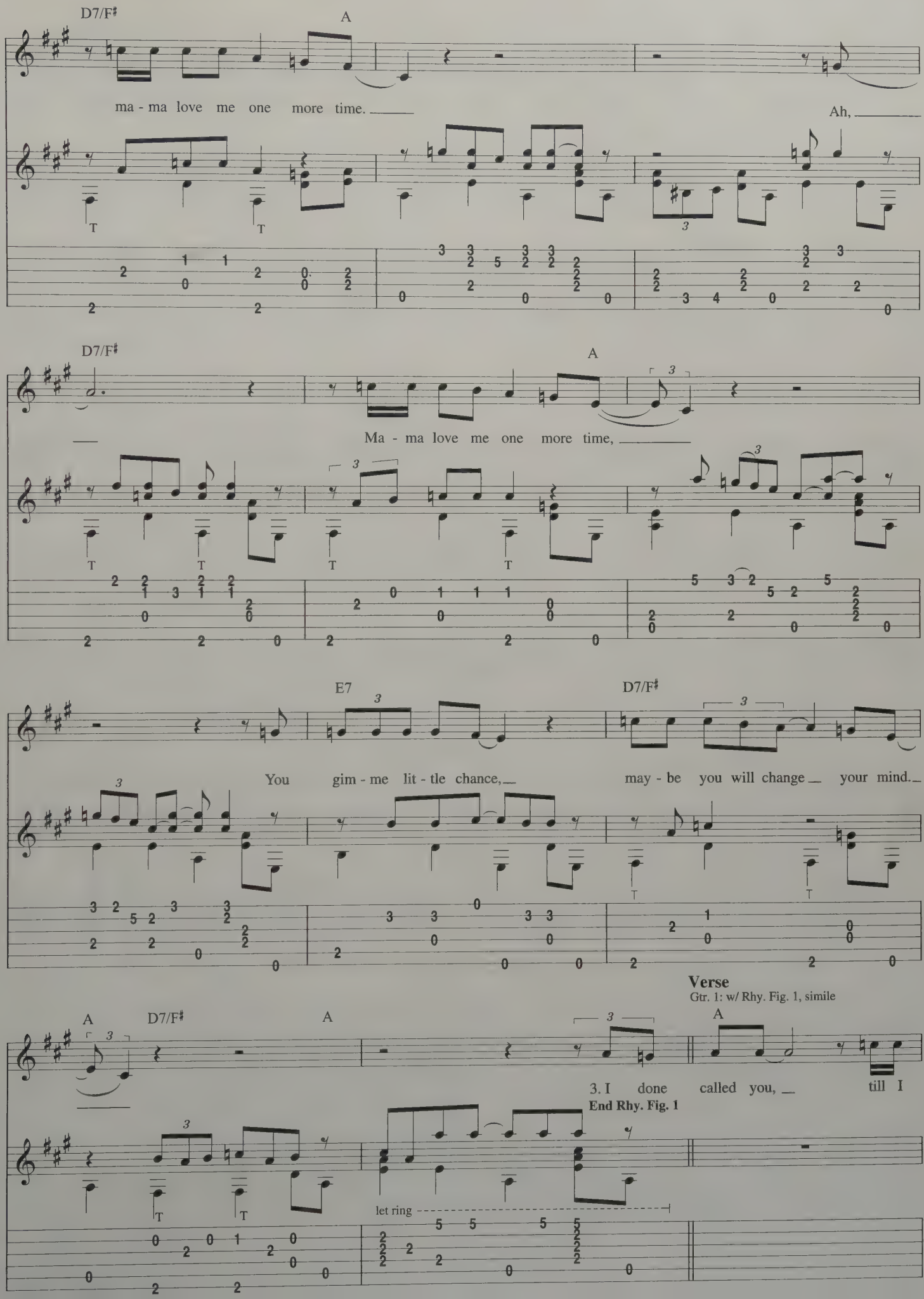
Arthur "Blind Blake" Phelps was from Tampa, Florida and one of the most brilliant practitioners of the East Coast school of blues guitar—a nimble picker with a bent towards ragtime and the more refined fingerstyle guitar found in Piedmont blues. He would go on to have a significant influence on Big Bill Broonzy, Blind Boy Fuller, Josh White, and the Reverend Gary Davis.

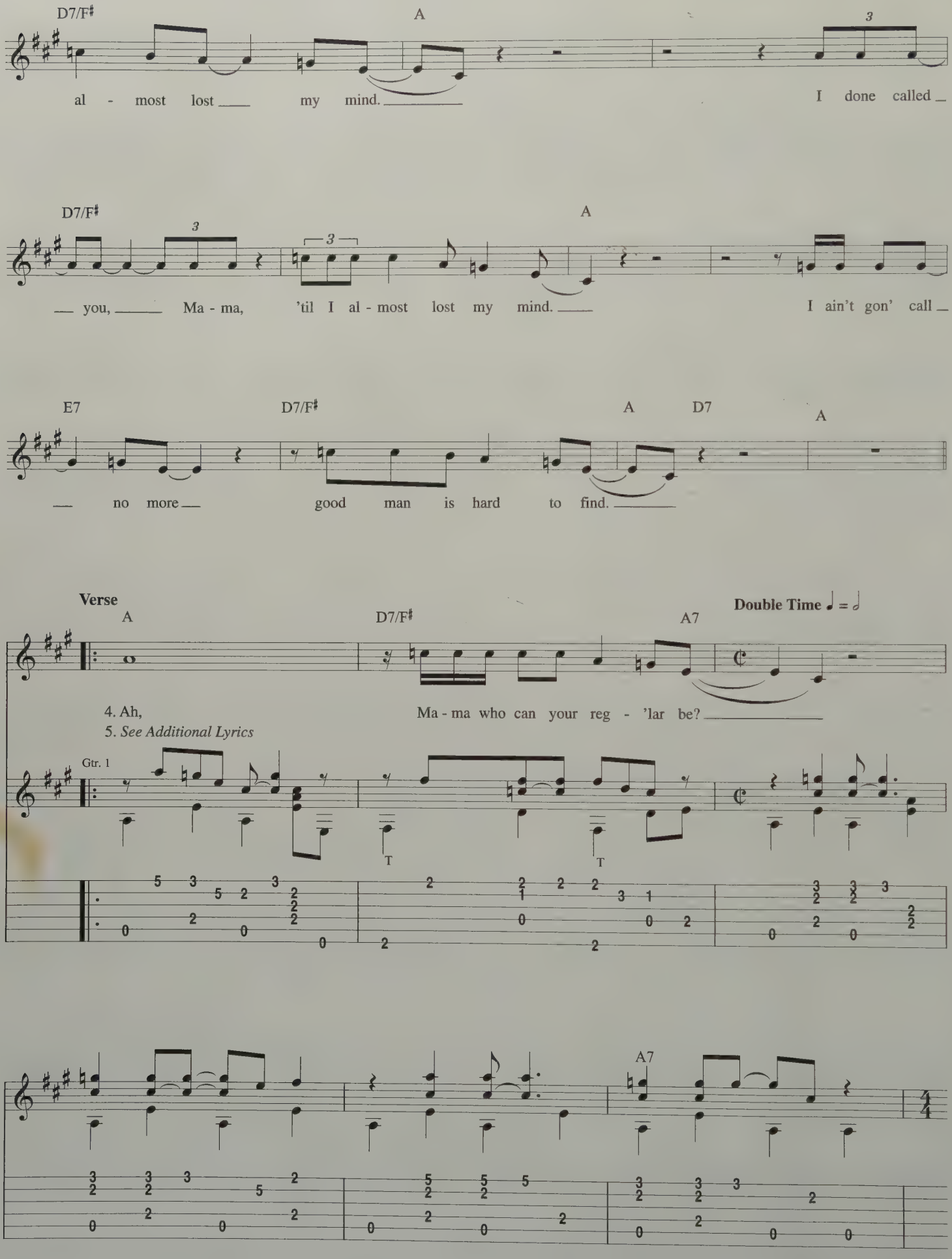
Though it does not contain a boogie-based accompaniment, "One Time Blues" appears to be the inspiration for "Sweet Home Chicago" in its melody and phrasing. One of the unique aspects of the tune that Robert Johnson did not pick up on is the double-time feel that Blake breaks into in verses 4 and 5.

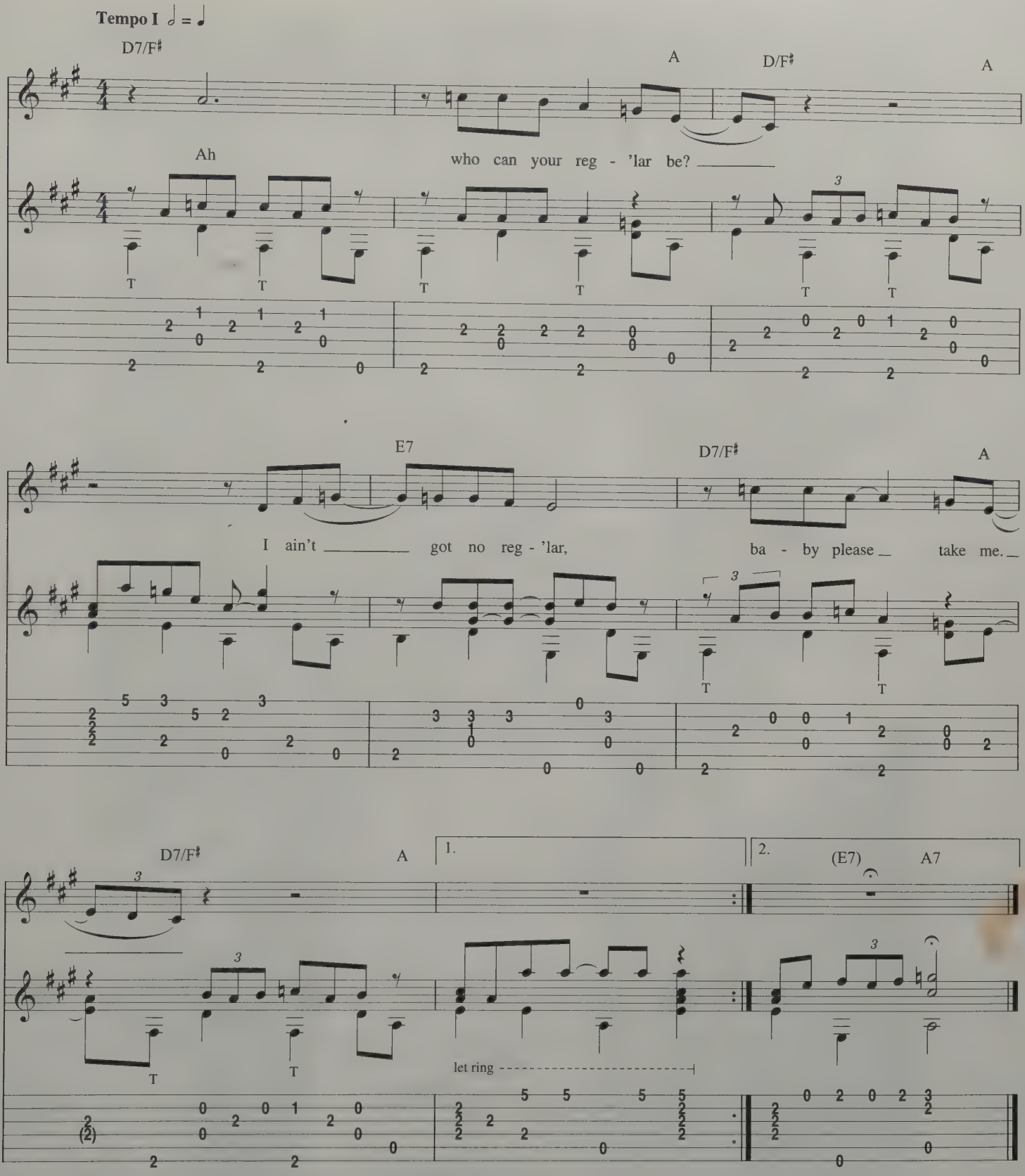
Notice the fills in measures 3 and 4 and measures 11 and 12 of the verse (I) that answer the vocal line. Something similar occurs for the hook in "I'm a Steady Rollin' Man" and is likely one of the primary templates for this type of blues lick. By barring at fret 2 with your index finger, you can easily reach the root (A), ♭7th (G), and 6th (F♯) notes on string 1. Be sure to only cover strings 4–6 so you can access the open A and low E strings. Also of note is the way Blake moves up in pitch from the low open E string on beat 4 of the V (E) chord to the 3rd (F♯) of the D7/F♯ inversion for the IV (D) chord. This can be observed in the intro and before the turnaround in each verse.




D/F♯
A
a ris - ing sun go - in' down.
Ah, _
D7/F♯
A
the ris - ing sun go - in' down.
E7
D7
I ain't got no - bod - y,
since my ba - by blowed this town.
A
Verse
A
2. Ah,
Rhy. Fig. 1


D7/F♯
A
ma - ma love me one more time.
Ah,
D7/F♯
A
Ma - ma love me one more time,
E7
D7/F♯
You gim - me lit - tle chance,
may - be you will change your mind.
Verse
Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1, simile
A
D7/F♯
A
A
3. I done called you, till I
End Rhy. Fig. 1
let ring


D7/F♯
A
al - most lost my mind.
I done called
D7/F♯
A
you, Ma - ma, 'til I al - most lost my mind.
I ain't gon' call
E7
D7/F♯
A
D7
A
no more good man is hard to find.
Verse
A
D7/F♯
A7
Double Time ♩ = 𝅗𝅥
4. Ah,
Ma - ma who can your reg - 'lar be?
5. See Additional Lyrics
Gtr. 1
A7



Additional Lyrics

5. Take me, mama, I'll tell you what I'll do,
   Take me, mama, I'll tell you what I'll do,
   I'll get up every mornin', work hard all day for you.

Son House: House sang and played like a man possessed by either God or the devil—take your choice.

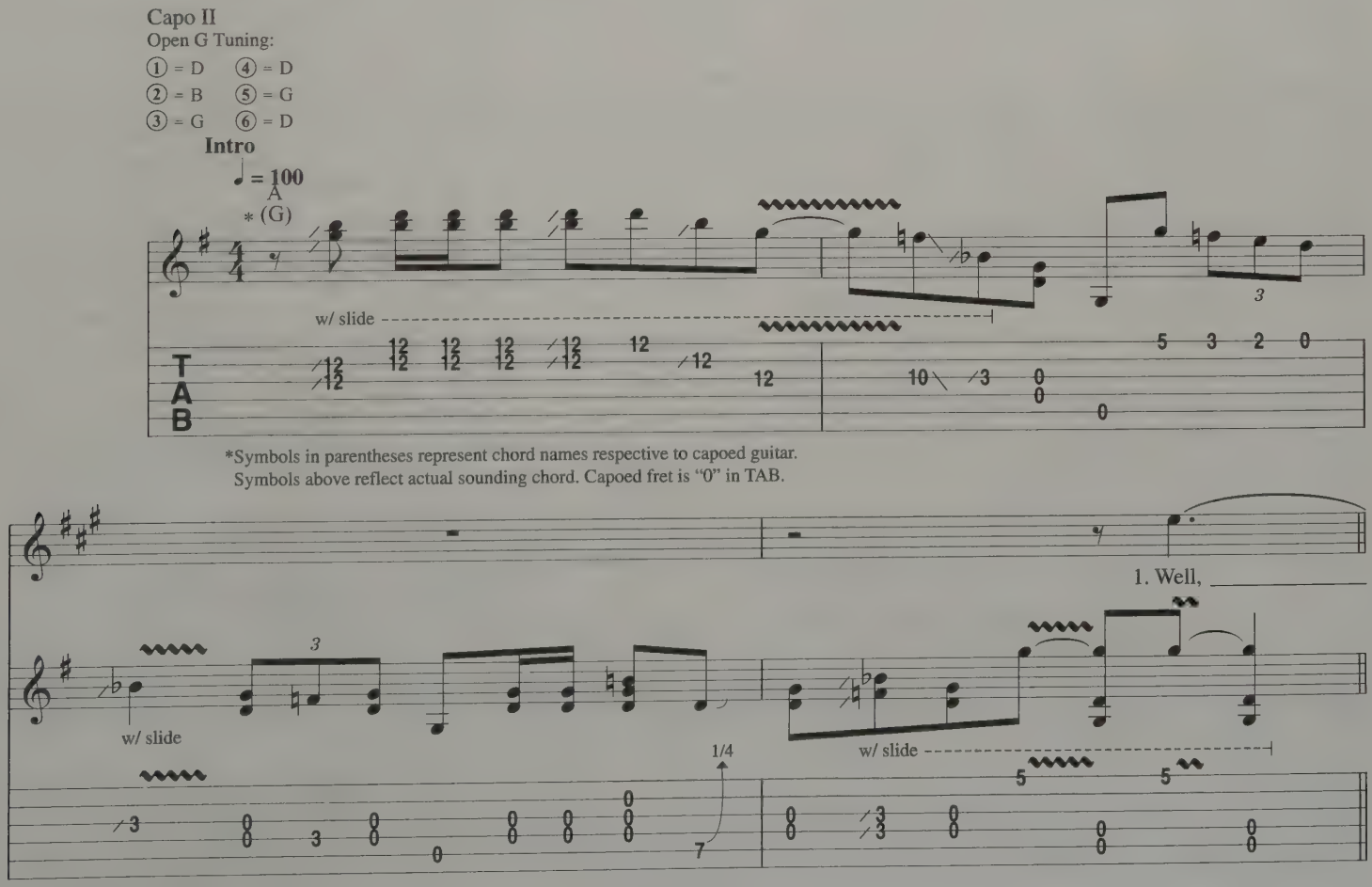
MY BLACK MAMA

Son House (1902–1988)

A true legend of the blues in every way, Eddie "Son" House personified the raw angst associated with deep Delta blues. In 1930 he recorded a session for Paramount that produced nine sides. Only four have survived: "Preaching The Blues" and "My Black Mama," both consisting of two sides each. In 1942, Alan Lomax recorded Son for the Library of Congress but by the late forties, he had quit the music business after having relocated to Rochester, New York. In 1964, three white blues fans finally tracked him down and he enjoyed the fruits of the sixties Blues revival with new recordings and festival appearances. A guitarist of limited technique with a voice as impassioned as anyone in the blues, the ferocious, driving rhythms in his music cuts to the heart of human emotions. He has had a profound influence on every bluesman who has followed in his footsteps, including Robert Johnson.

Johnson's "Walking Blues" is a direct descendant of "My Black Mama." House's song is in open G tuning and he works extensively from the open strings (providing the G—tonic chord) and the octave at fret 12. Though in a standard 12-bar blues format, "My Black Mama" implies only the I and V (D) chord changes. You will notice that House may have been thinking of the IV (C) chord in measures 5 and 6 as he sings mainly the G (5th of C) note. In addition, he only plays the root (D) note over measures 9 and 10, though he sings notes from the G blues scale with emphasis on the D in the beginning of measure 9.

The "hook" of the piece is the steady quarter-note G chords punctuated by the 5th on the "and" of beat 4, played with the middle finger. Note the integration of slide embellishments with the open and fretted notes throughout.



By SON HOUSE
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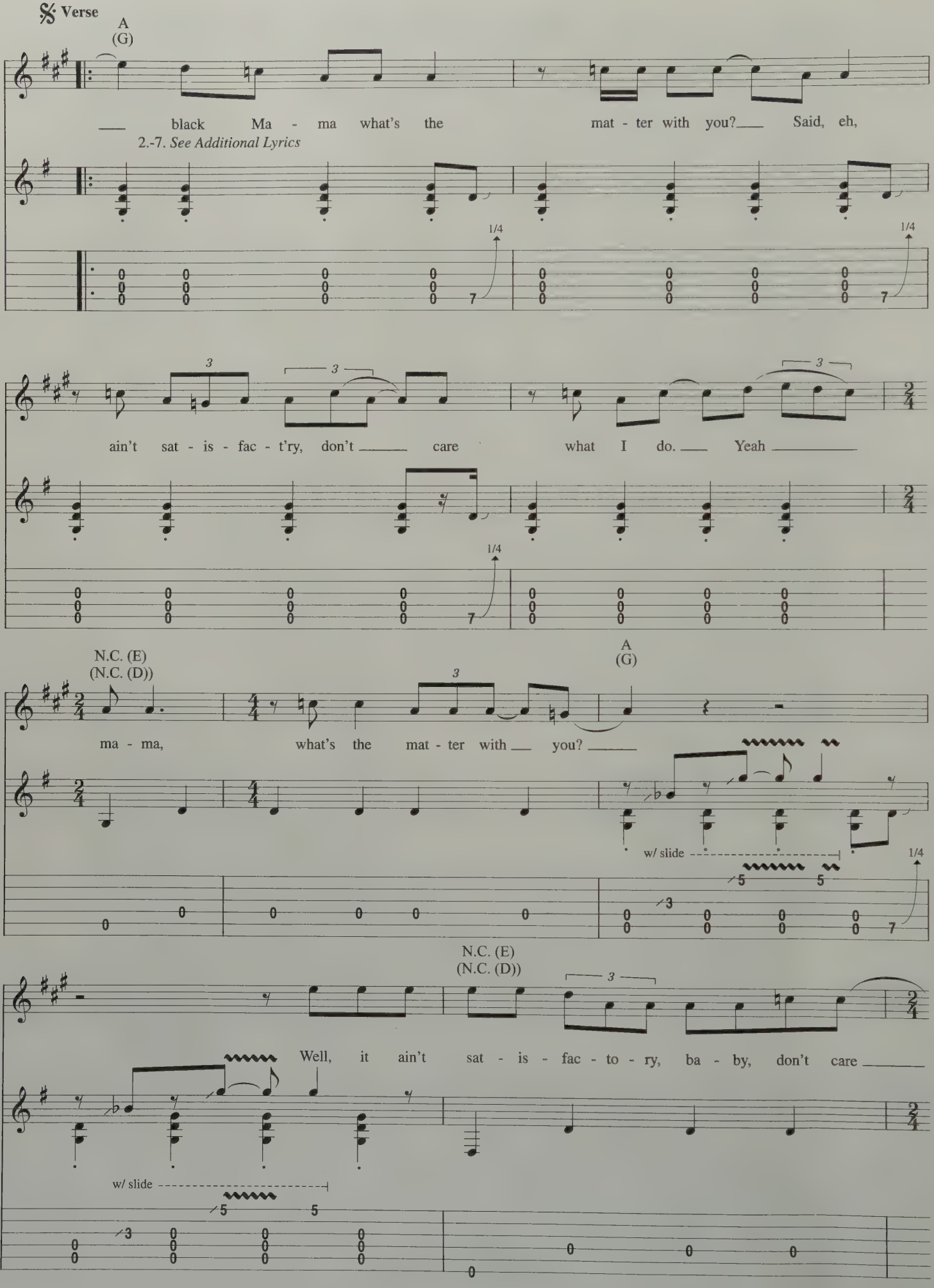
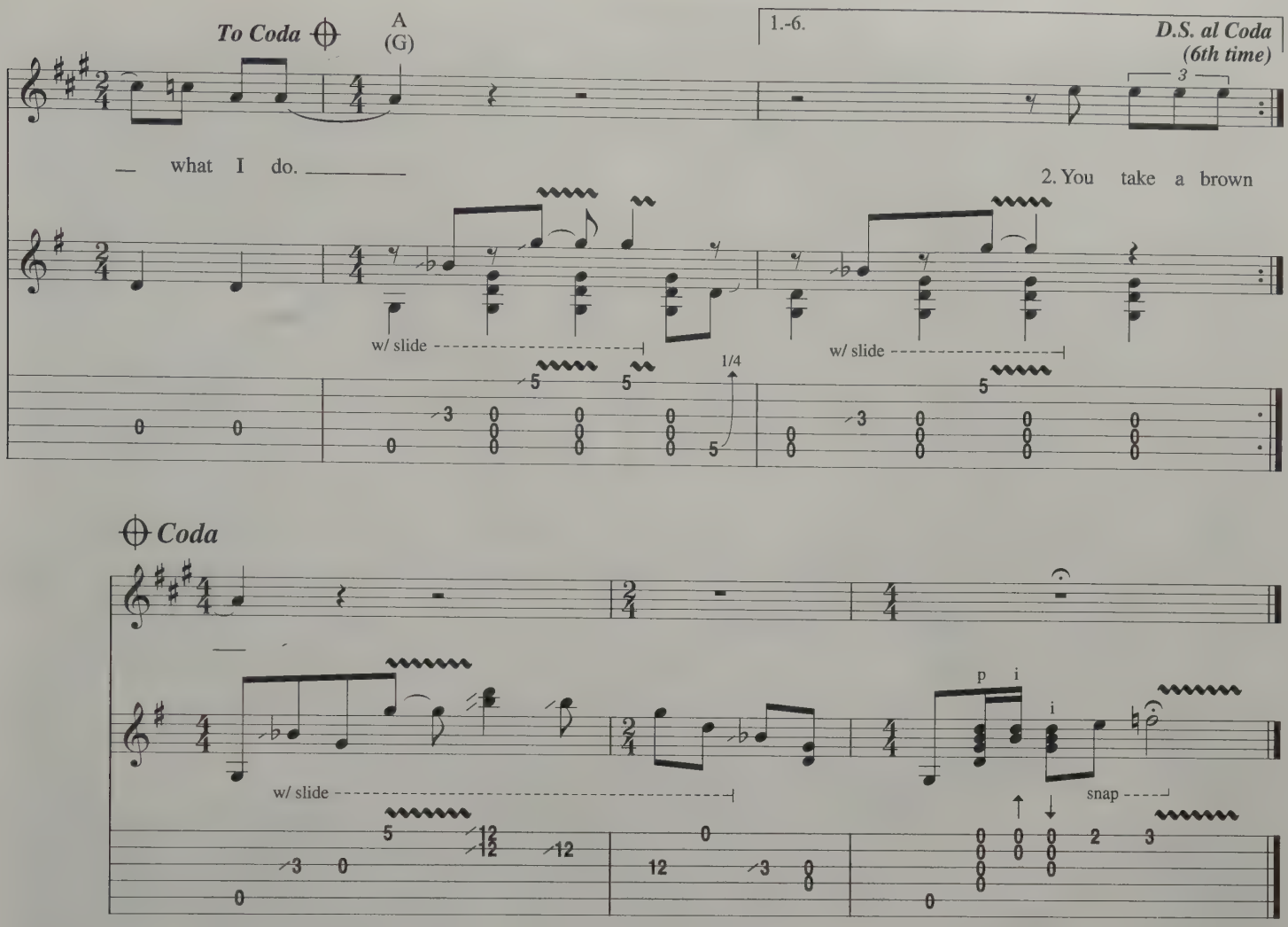

Verse
A
(G)
black Ma - ma what's the mat - ter with you? Said, eh,
2.-7. See Additional Lyrics
1/4
ain't sat - is - fac - t'ry, don't care what I do. Yeah
N.C. (E)
(N.C. (D))
A
(G)
ma - ma, what's the mat - ter with you?
w/ slide
N.C. (E)
(N.C. (D))
Well, it ain't sat - is - fac - to - ry, ba - by, don't care



Additional Lyrics

2. You take a brownskin woman, make a rabbit move to town.
Said a jet black woman make a mule kick his stable down.
Oh, brownskin woman will make a rabbit move to town.
Oh, but a jet black woman will make a mule kick his stable down.

3. Yeah, ain't no heaven , there ain't no burnin' hell.
Said, where I'm goin' when I die can't nobody tell.
Oh, it ain't no heaven now, ain't no burnin' hell.
Oh, where I'm goin' when I die, can't nobody tell.

4. Well, my black mama's hair shine like the sun.
Oh, lipstick and powder sure won't help her none.
My black mama's hair shine like the sun.
Oh, lipstick and powder, well, it sure won't help her none.

5. Well, you see my milkcow, tell her, hurry home.
I ain't had no milk since that cow been gone.
If you see my milkcow, tell her to hurry home.
Yeah, I ain't had no milk since that cow been gone.

6. Well, I'm goin' to the race track to see my pony run.
He's the best in the world but he's a runnin' son of a gun.
I'm goin' to the race track to see me pony run.
He's the best in the world but he's a runnin' son of a gun.

7. Oh, Lord have mercy on my wicked soul.
Wouldn't mistreat you baby for my weight in gold.
Oh, Lord have mercy on my wicked soul.
Mmmmm.

Peetie Wheatstraw: His nicknames, the "Devil's Son-In Law" and the "High Sheriff from Hell" were as influential as his primitive guitar playing.

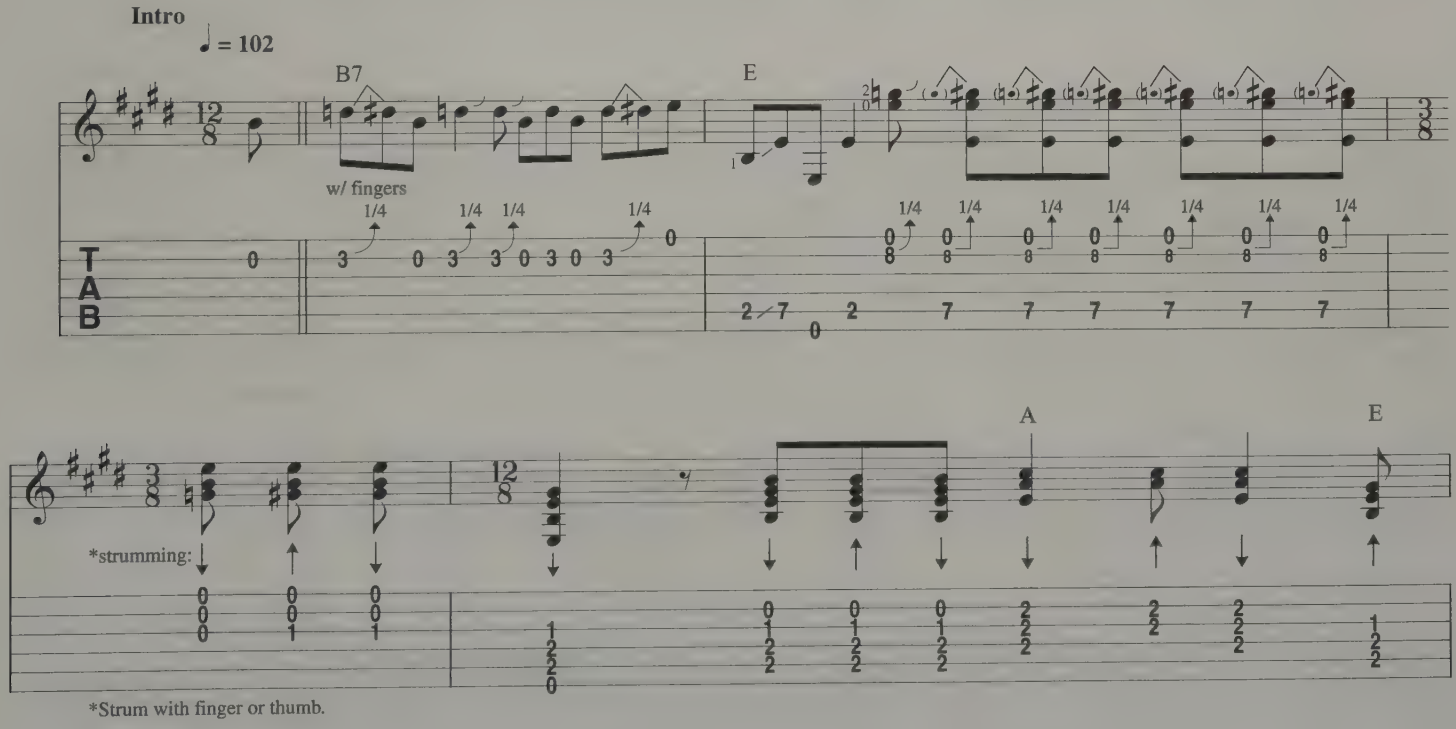
POLICE STATION BLUES

Peetie Wheatstraw (1902–1941)

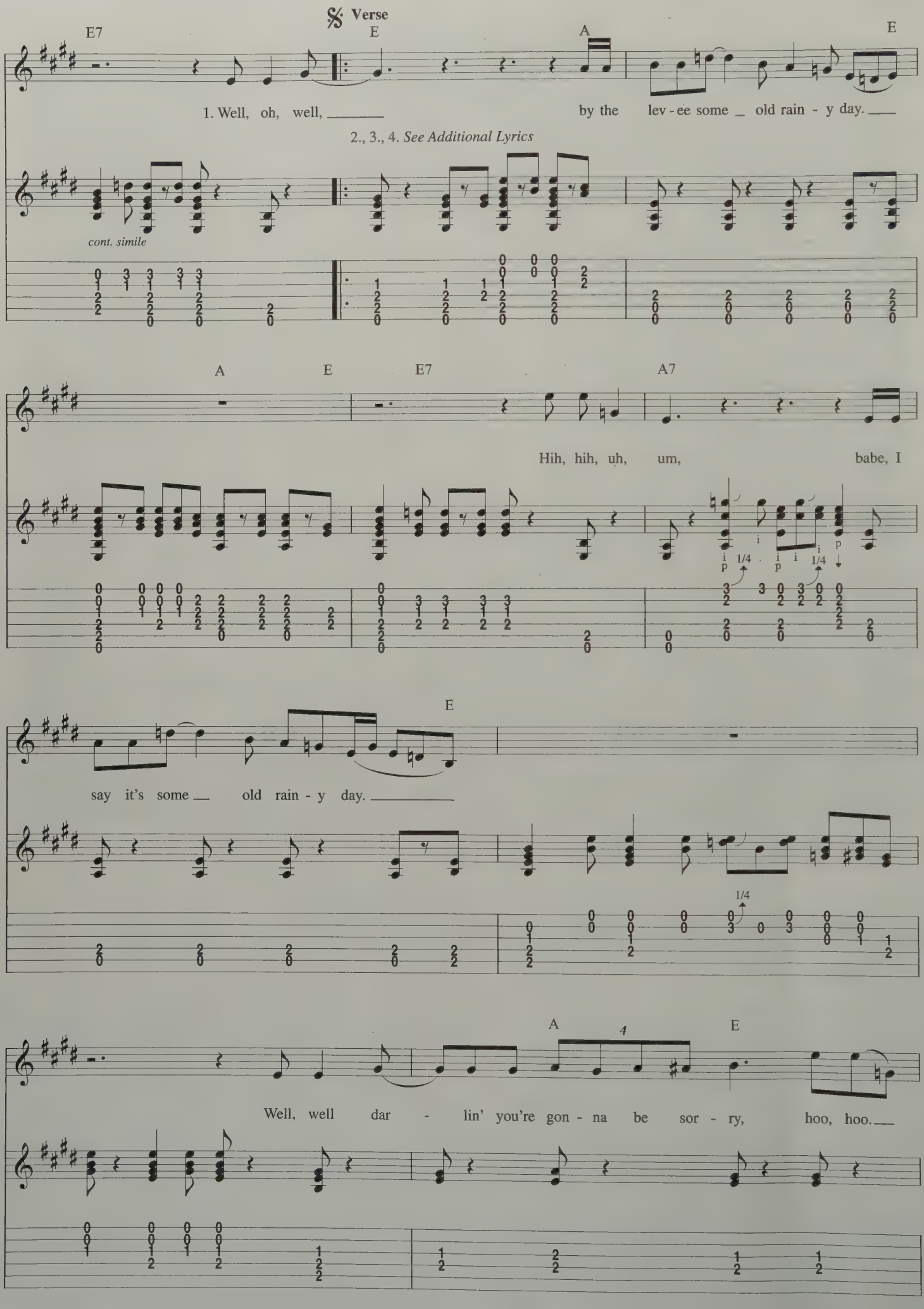
The "Devils Son-In-Law," also known as the "High Sheriff From Hell" (Peetie Wheatstraw), was a popular recording artist of the thirties. A guitarist and piano player with limited skills on the six string, he nonetheless left a vital legacy of Delta blues. "Bring Me Flowers When I'm Living," "C and A Blues," "Crazy with the Blues," and "Peetie Wheatstraw Stomp" are included in a repertoire drawn from a fairly prolific career for a country bluesman.

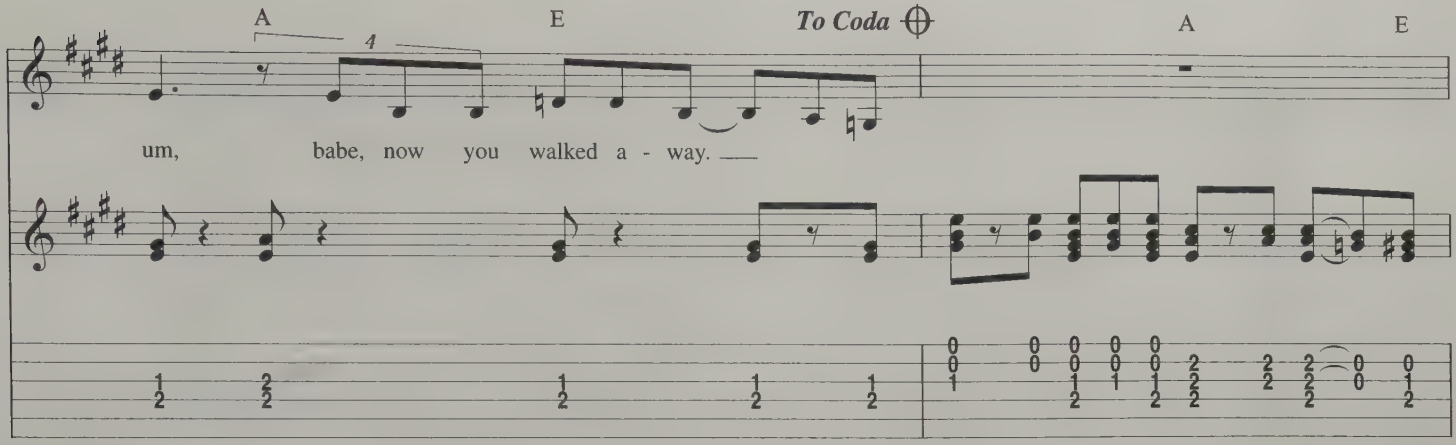
"Police Station Blues" is similar to many of Wheatstraw's recordings and may well have been the inspiration for "Terraplane Blues" though it is in standard tuning and conventionally fretted. While a straightforward "stomp" in E, it contains several classic moves common to acoustic country blues. In measure 2 of the intro, Wheatstraw bends the ♭3rd (G) up one quarter step to the true "blue note" in between the ♭3rd and the major 3rd (G♯) while using the high open E (root) string as a pedal tone. Measure 4 of verse 1 contains a three-note E7 voicing on beats 2 and 3 that country blues guitarists like to use as a form of chordal "shorthand."

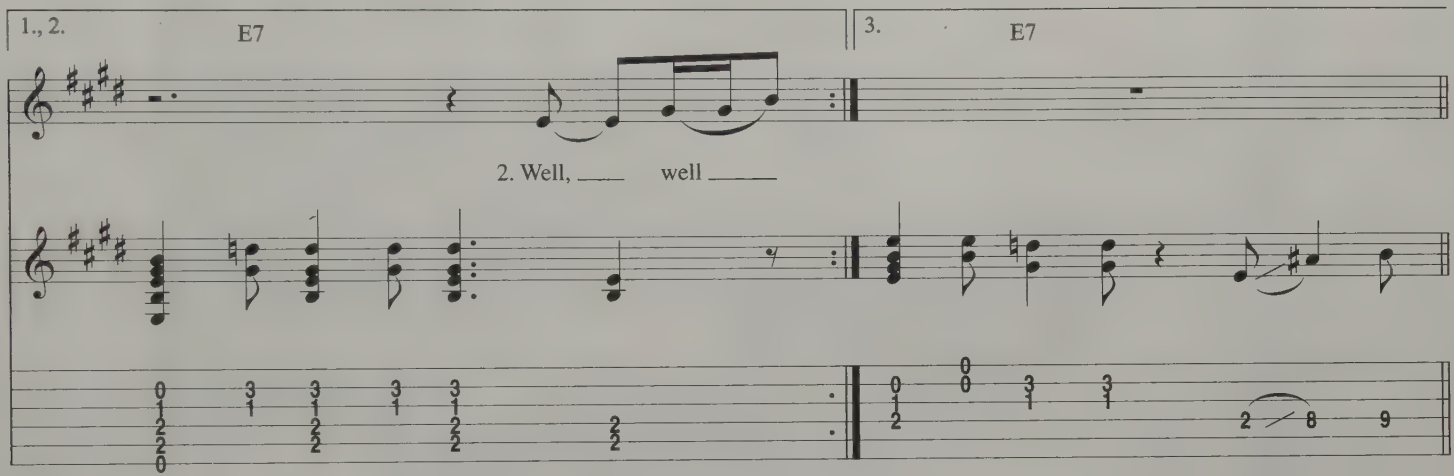
The solo offers much edification for the devotee. Measures 1 and 2 indicate the I (E) chord with single note lines based on the 5th (B) and ♭3rd bent to the blue note. The IV (A) chord in measure 5 has a series of cool quarter-note blues bends involving A♯ (♭9), D (4th), and G (♭7th). Lastly, the V (B) chord in measure 9 is outlined with the root (B) and 5th (F♯) notes and the 4th (E) and ♭9th (C♯) notes in measure 11 added for bluesy tension.



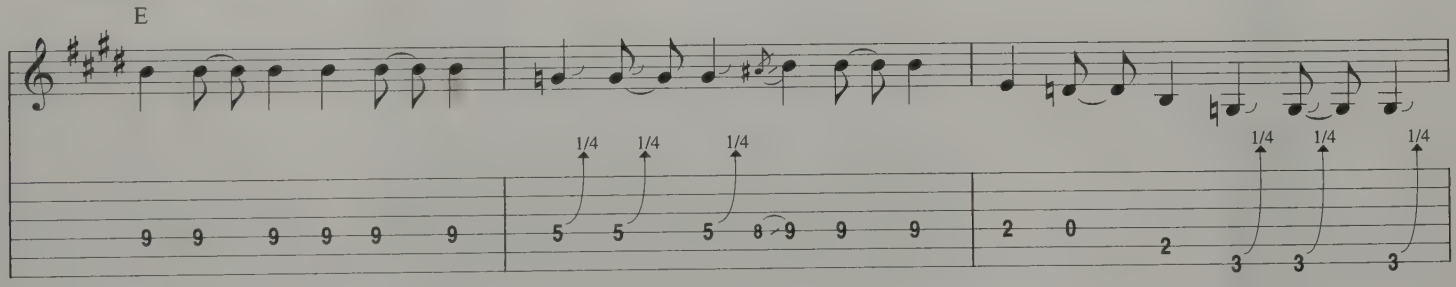
*Strum with finger or thumb.

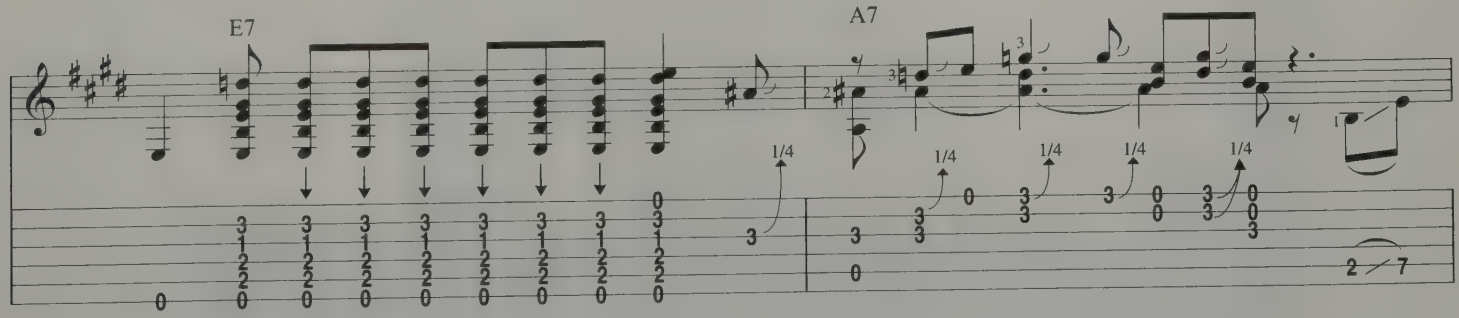

Verse
E7
E
A
E
1. Well, oh, well, by the lev - ee some old rain - y day.
2., 3., 4. See Additional Lyrics
cont. simile
A
E
E7
A7
Hih, hih, uh, um, babe, I
E
say it's some old rain - y day.
A
E
Well, well dar - lin' you're gon - na be sor - ry, hoo, hoo.

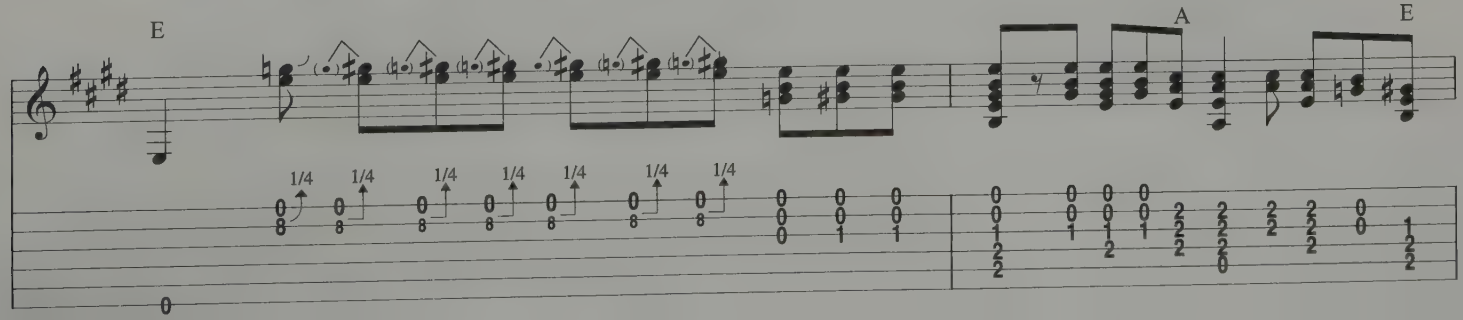

A
E
To Coda
A
E
um, babe, now you walked a - way.

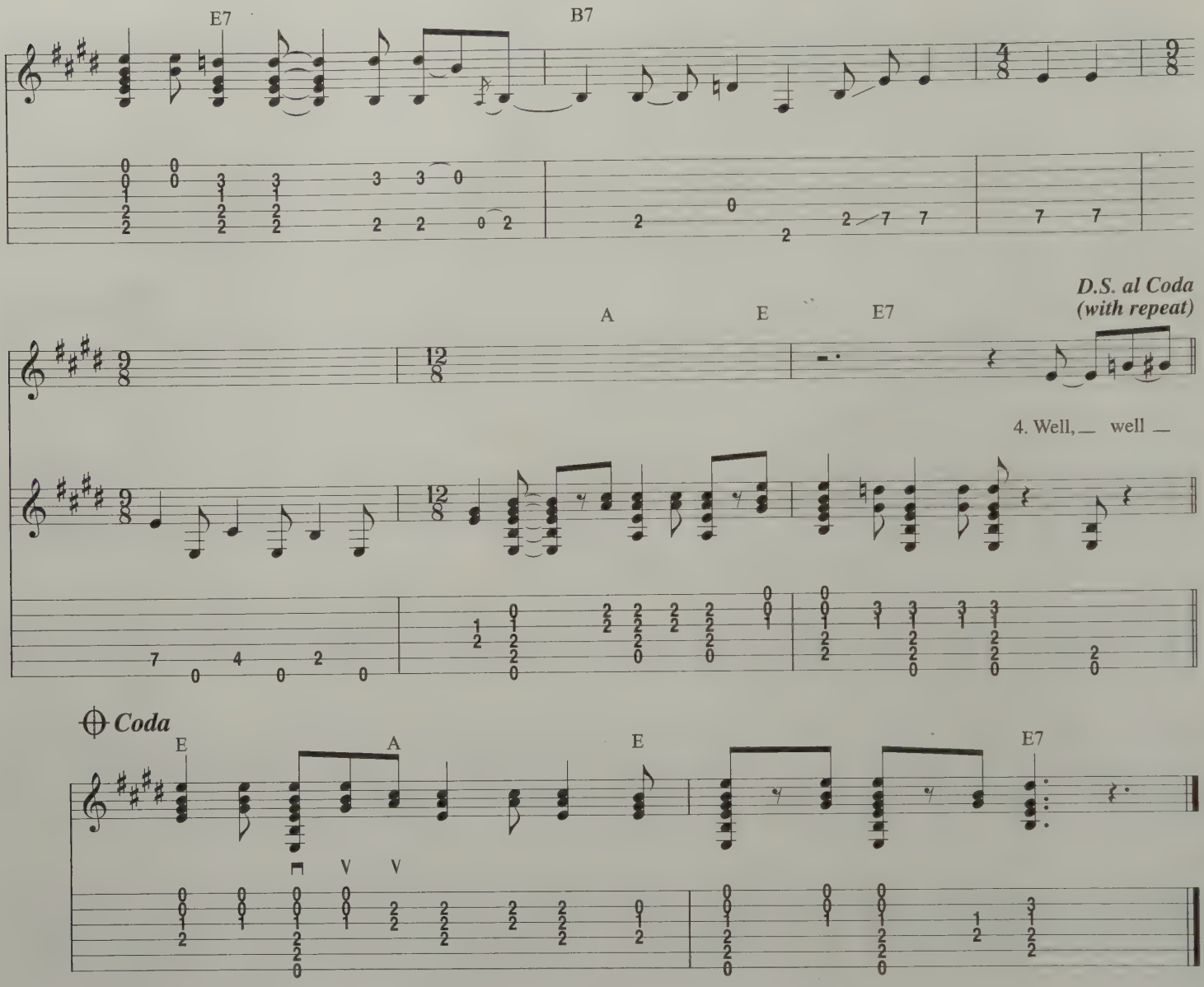

1., 2.
E7
3.
E7
2. Well, well

Guitar Solo


E


E7
A7


E
A
E

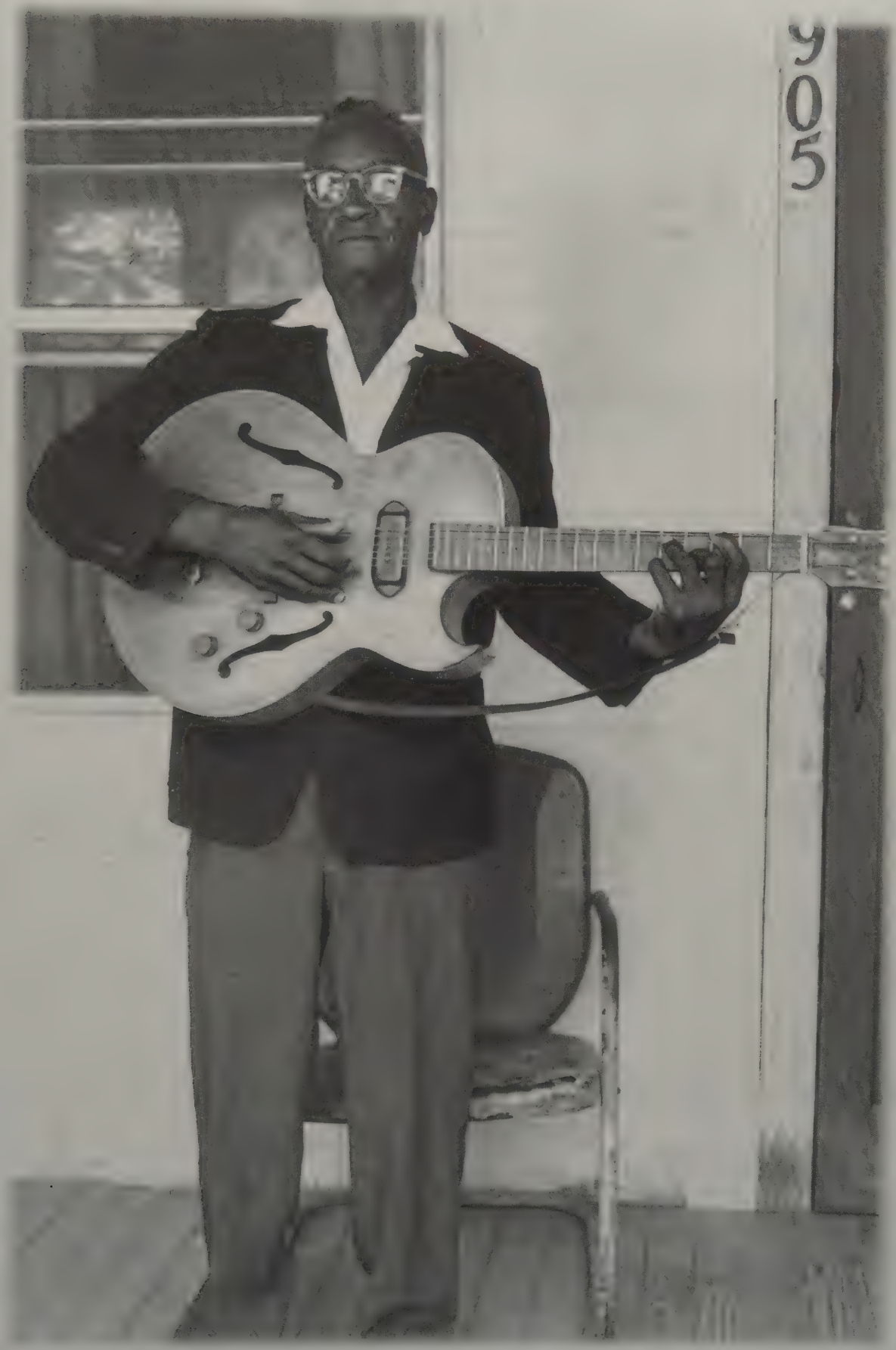


Additional Lyrics

2. Well, well someday soon,
Mama, now just before the train.
I said now when the sun go,
Humm, just before the train.
Well, now, went to the police station, asked them,
Now give me my little girl, please.

3. Well now, I've never been so lonesome,
Find your nights so dreadful 'lone, hoo, cryin',
Carryin' 'round meanly, hoo, humm.
Babe, now your nights so dreadful 'lone
Well, well bet some of the lonesome
Woo, ooh, freight's done come and gone.

4. Well, well your mind is somewhere, hoo-uumm,
Baby, the next day is Christmas Eve, hoo hoo, well.
No remaining.
I say honey now your mind is somewhere, hoo, hoo.
The next day was Christmas Eve.
Well, well, have I got a present, mama, babe,
Under your Christmas tree.



Johnny Temple: His "cut boogie" bass patterns are the foundation of modern blues.

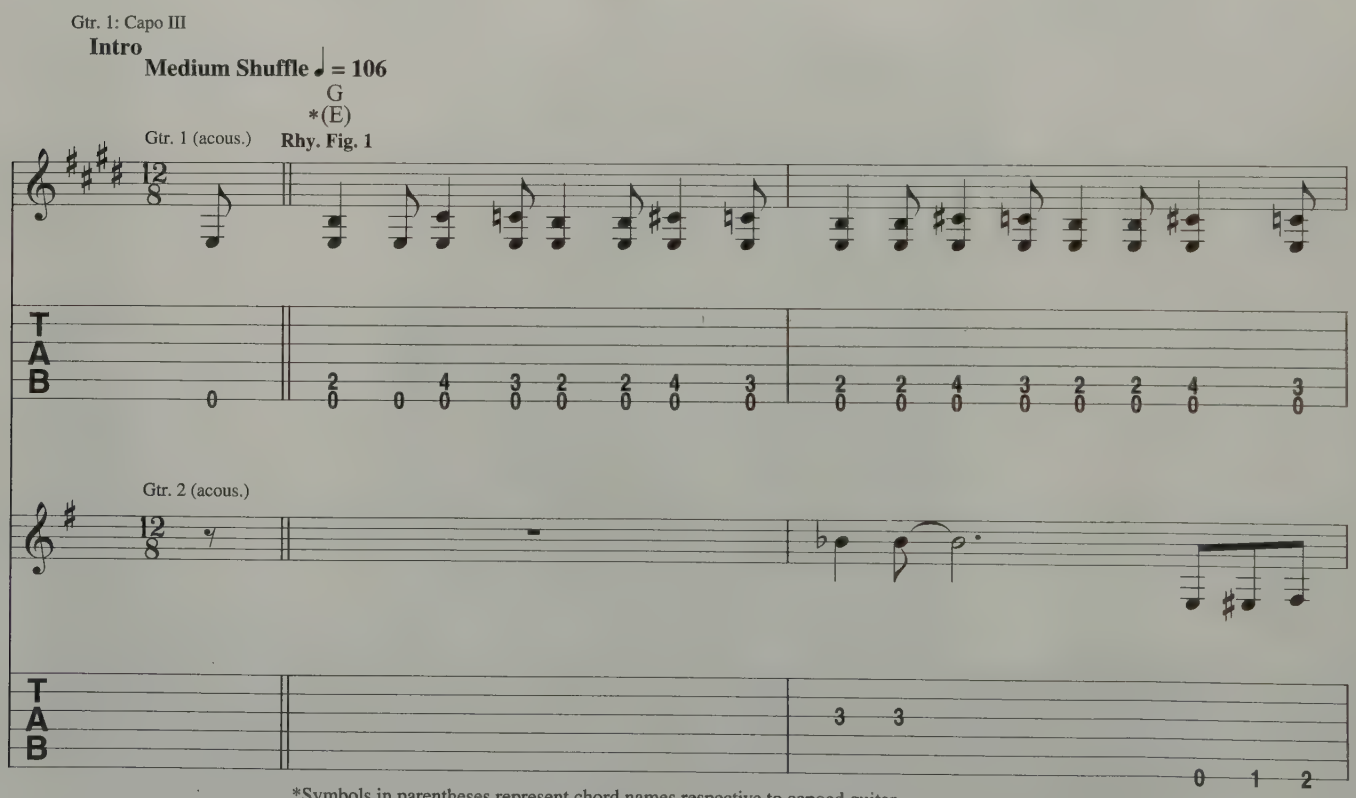
LEAD PENCIL BLUES

Johnnie Temple (1906–1968)

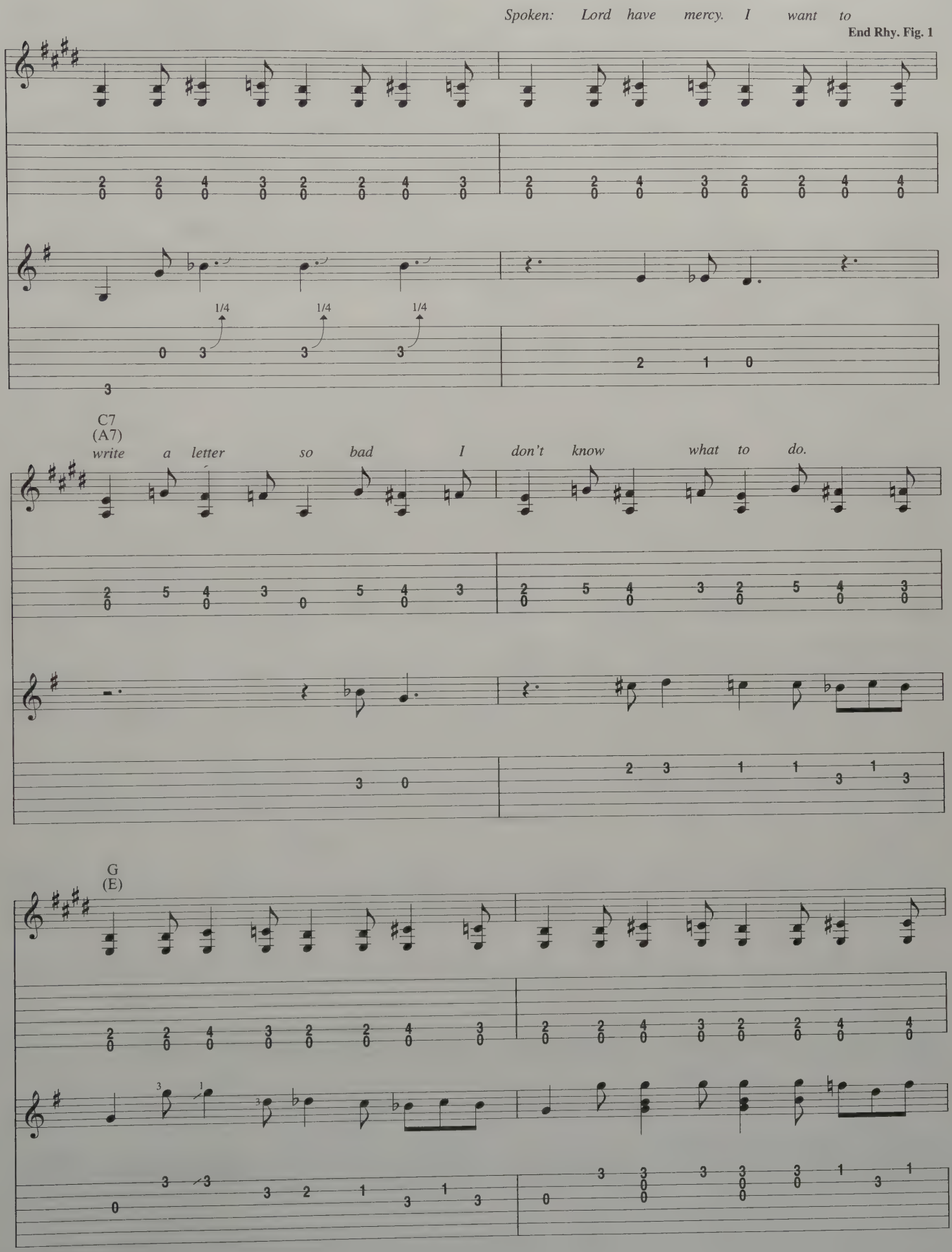
Johnnie Temple played guitar, mandolin and piano, and had a performing and recording career that spanned from the mid-thirties to the late fifties. "Big Leg Woman," "Gimme Some of That Yum Yum Yum," "Hoodoo Women," "I'm Cuttin' Out," "Louise Louise Blues," and "My Pony" were some of his best known songs. His place in blues history has been guaranteed because he was the first guitarist to record the "cut boogie" (5ths, 6ths, and ♭7ths) pattern that Johnson popularized and developed into the defining blues rhythm.

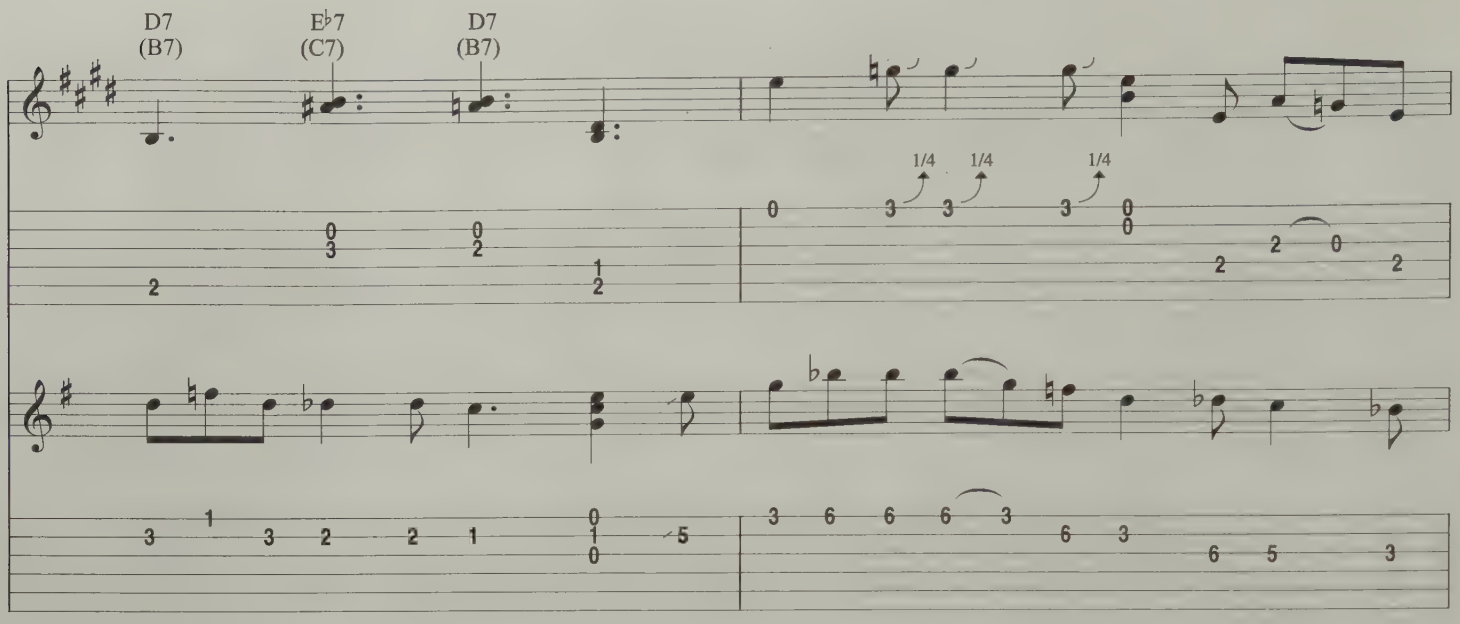
"Lead Pencil Blues" is a duet that Temple played with second guitarist Charlie McCoy. Both play in standard tuning, but Temple is capoed at fret 3 in order to access the key of G without having to stretch so far to the ♭7th. His rhythm is steady without being stiff, with a swinging feel that Johnson was to fortify with his own power and drive .

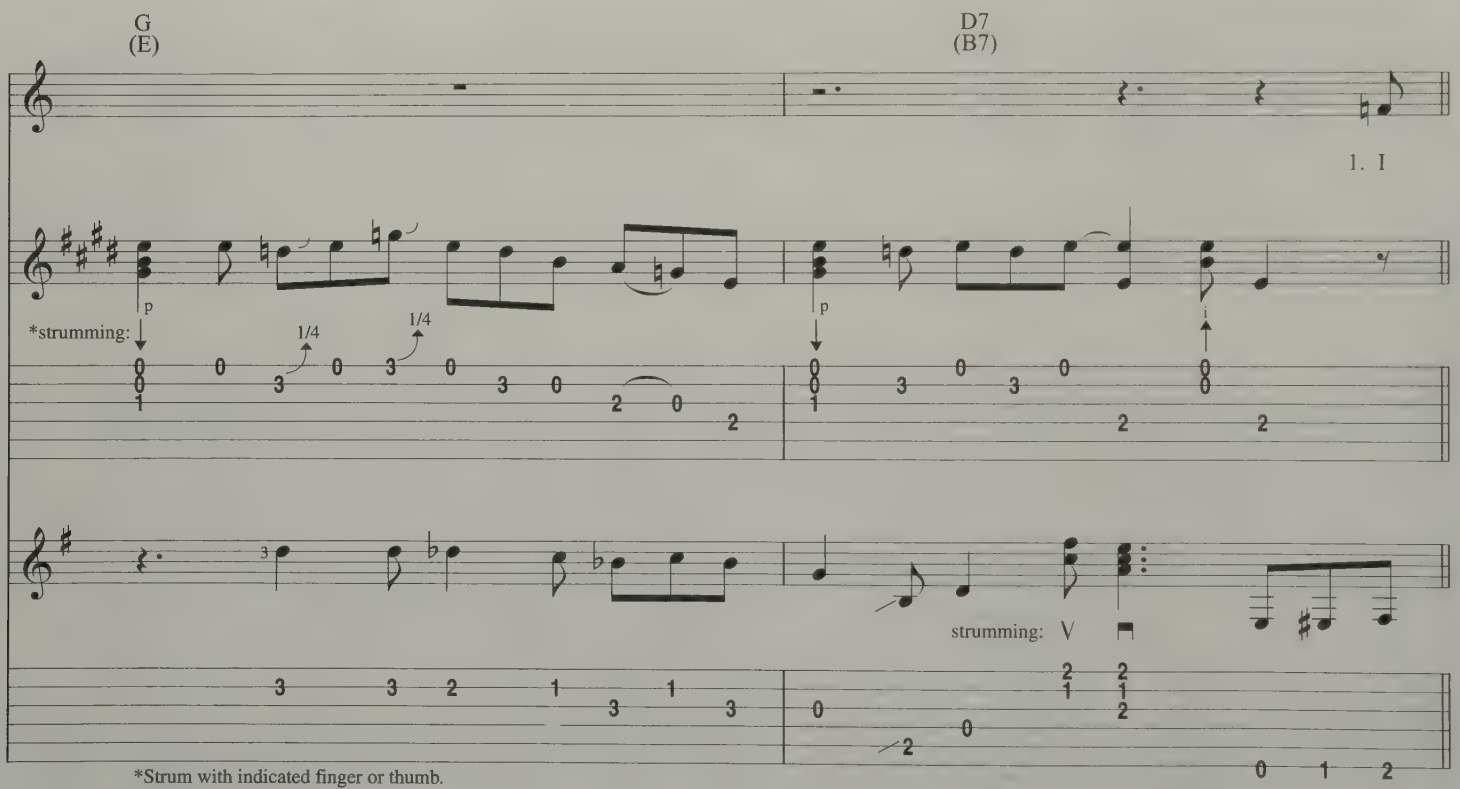
The intro is a great example of two guitars working together to provide a sound larger than the sum of its parts. McCoy fills skillfully with notes from the root and open positions of the G blues scale (G = root; B♭ = ♭3rd; C = 4th; D♭ = ♭5th; D = 5th; F = ♭7th) while Temple pumps away on the boogie pattern. During the turnarounds, they both play fill licks in a style that Muddy Waters and Jimmy Rogers would perfect on electric guitars in the fifties.



*Symbols in parentheses represent chord names respective to capoed guitar.
Symbols above reflect actual sounding chord. Capoed fret is "0" in TAB.


Spoken: Lord have mercy. I want to
End Rhy. Fig. 1
1/4
1/4
1/4
C7
(A7)
write a letter so bad I don't know what to do.
G
(E)

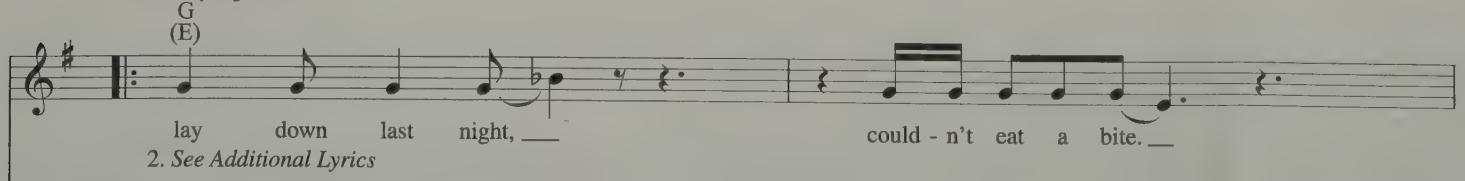




*Strum with indicated finger or thumb.

Verse

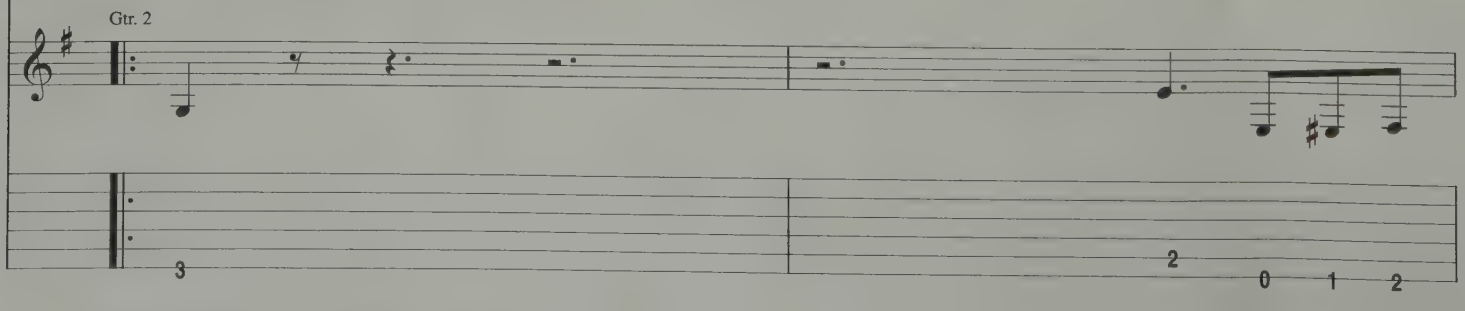
Gtr 1:w/ Rhy. Fig. 1, simile

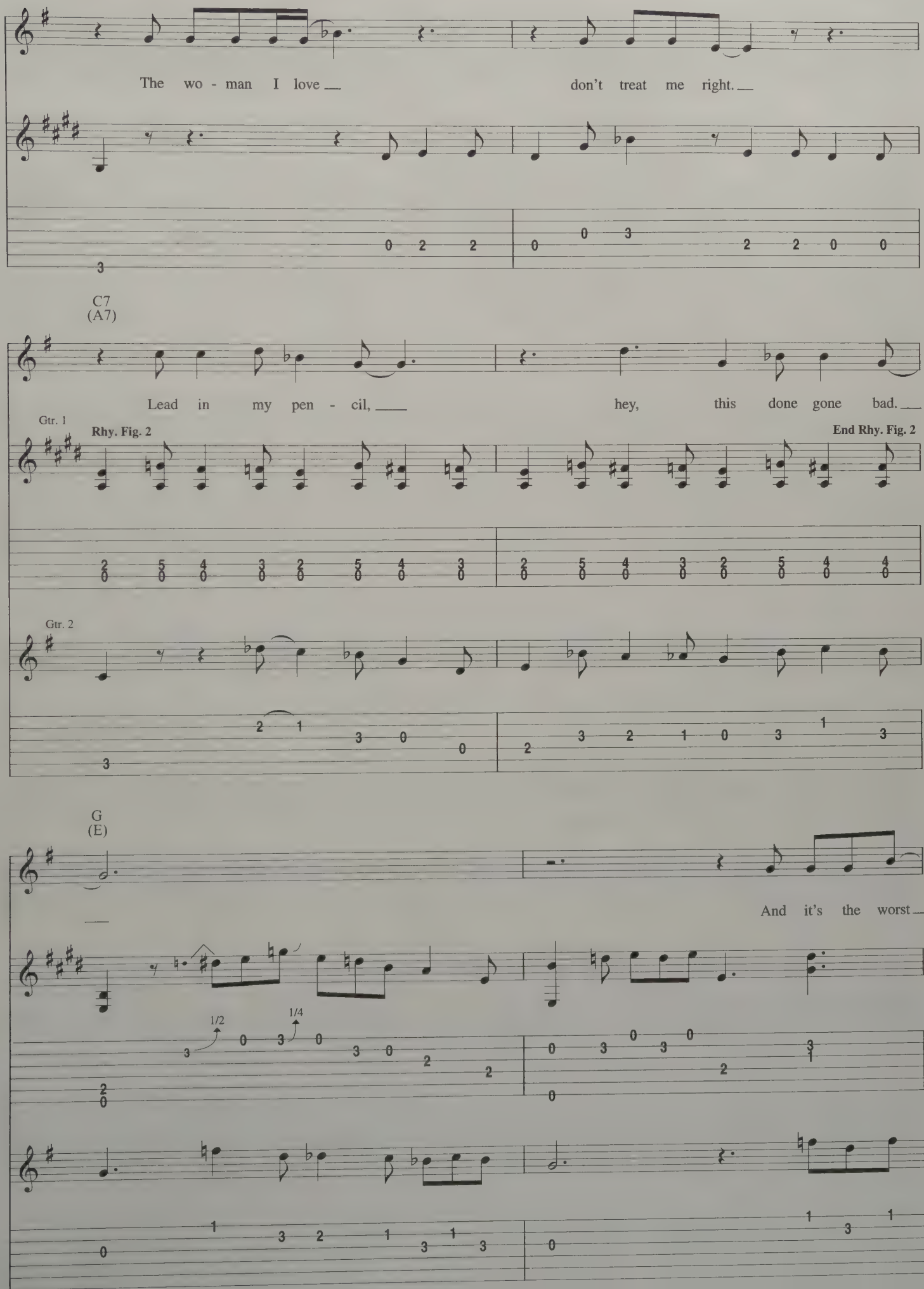


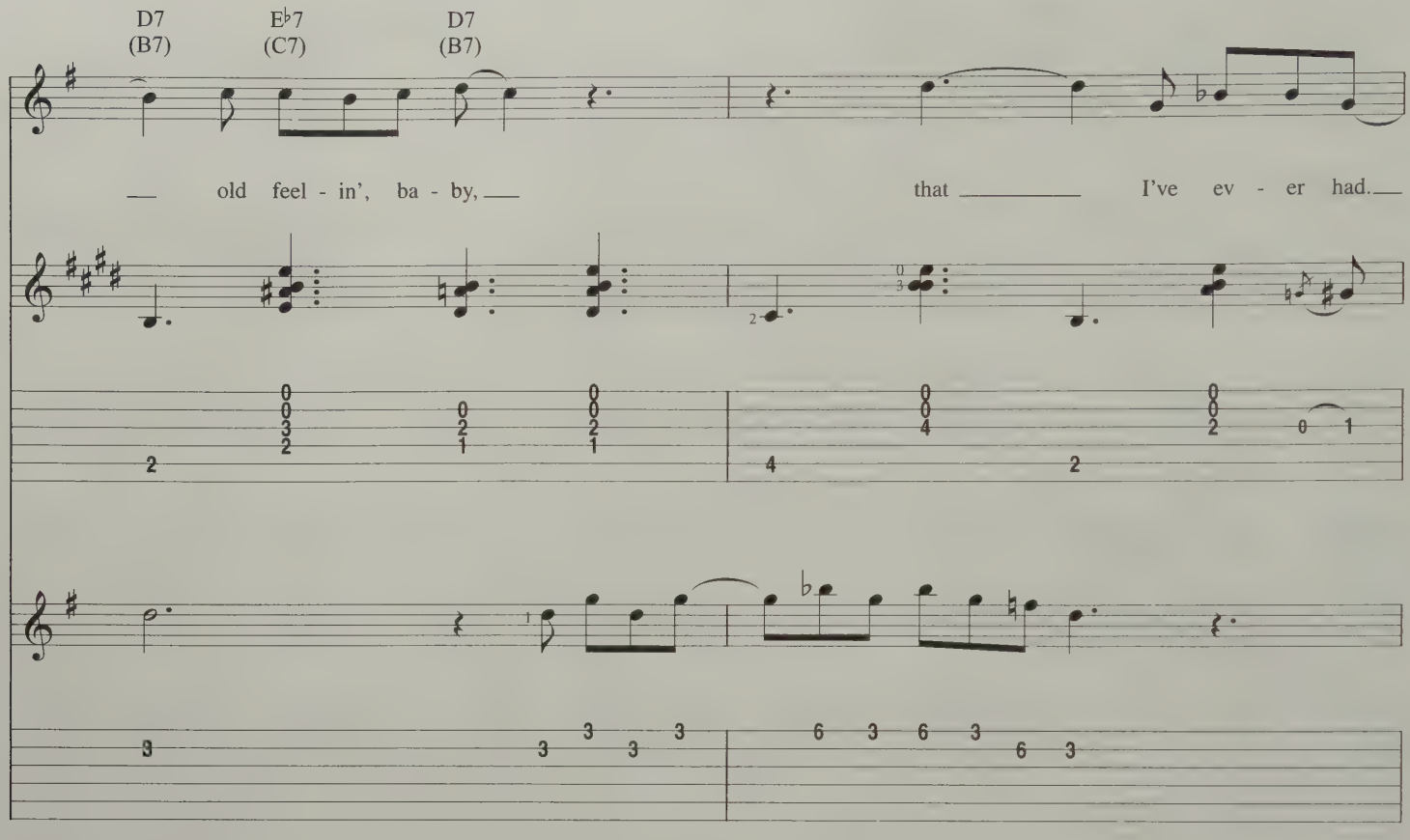
lay down last night, ___ could - n't eat a bite. __

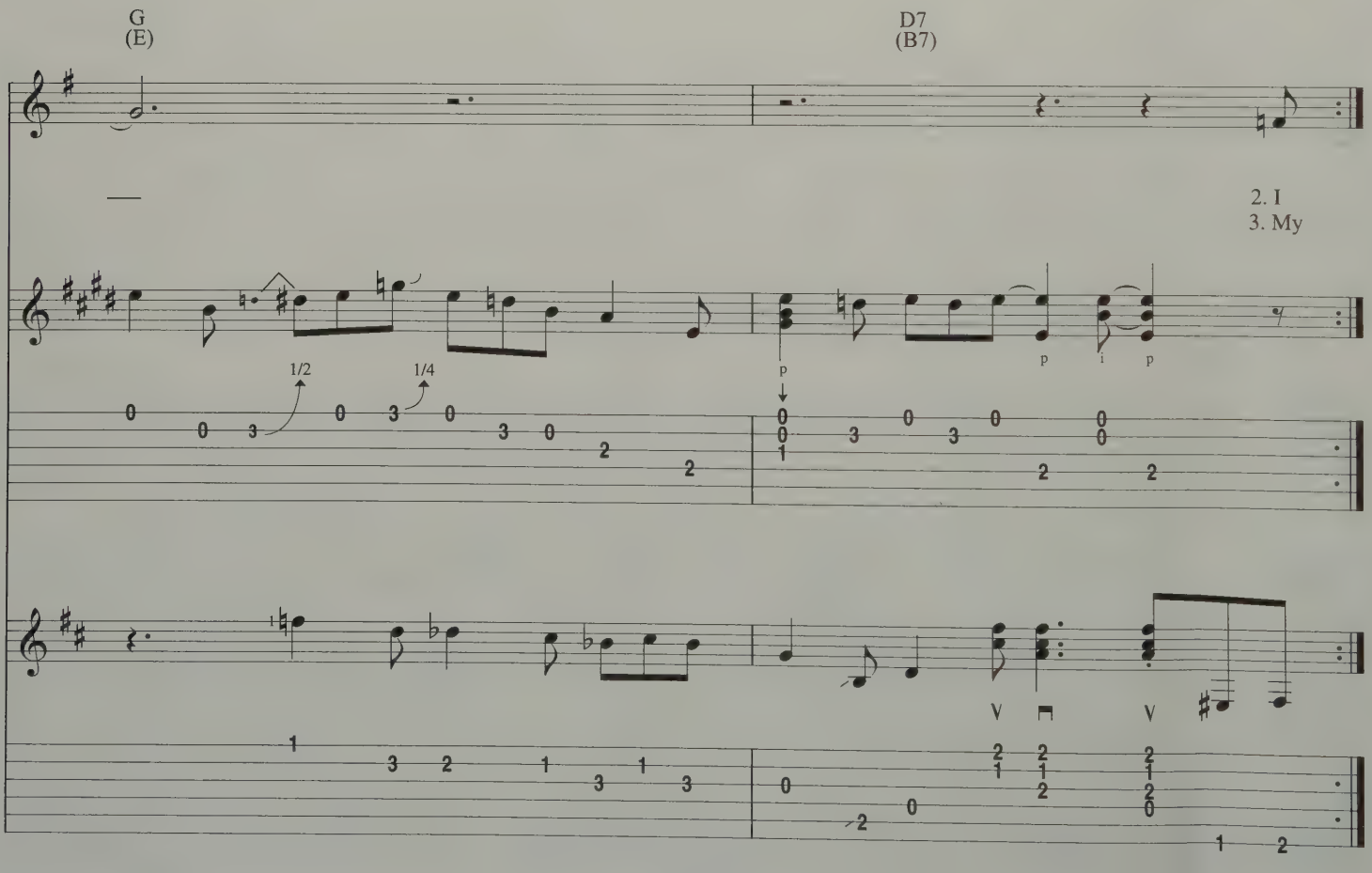
2. *See Additional Lyrics*

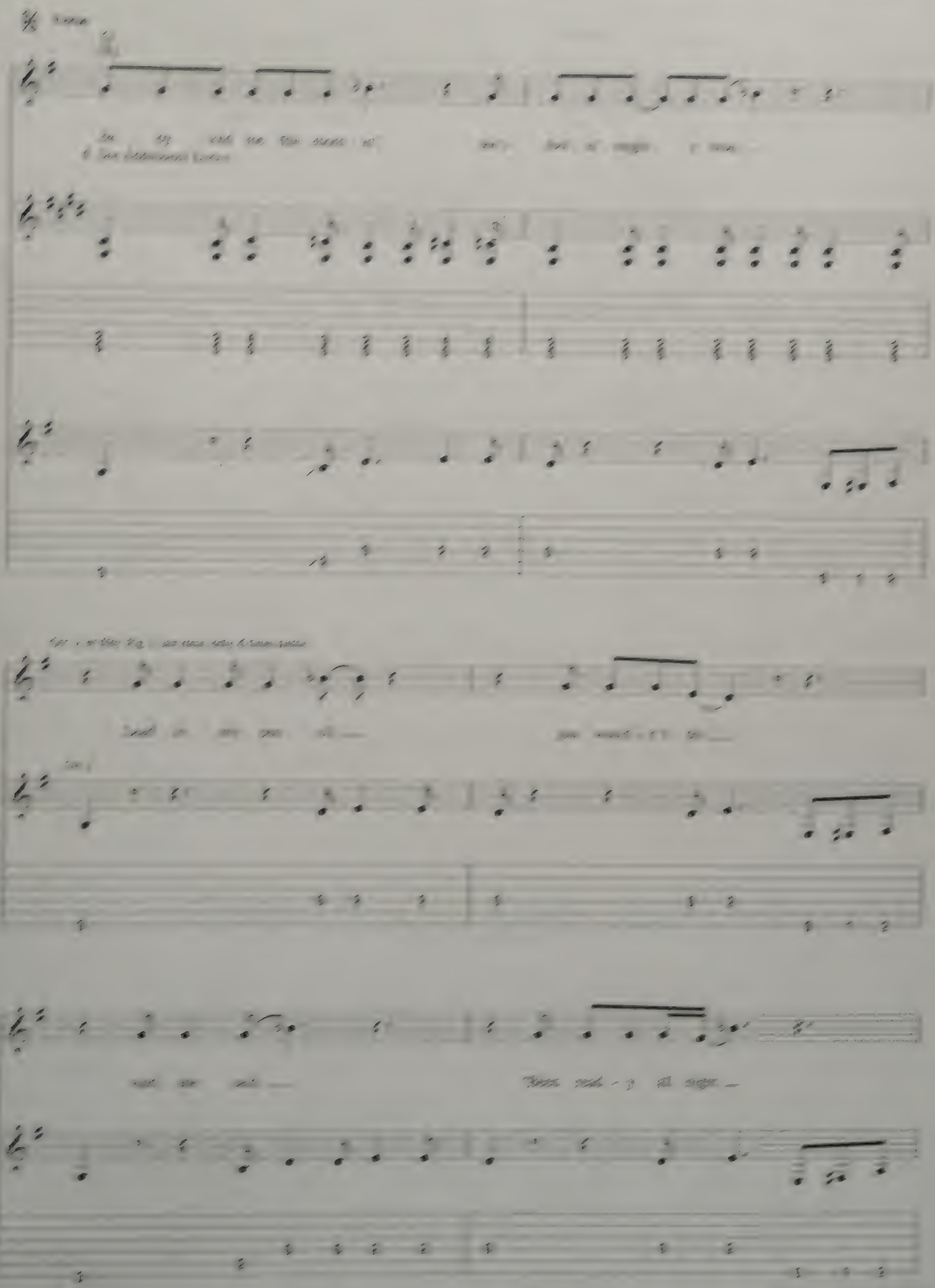
Gtr. 2

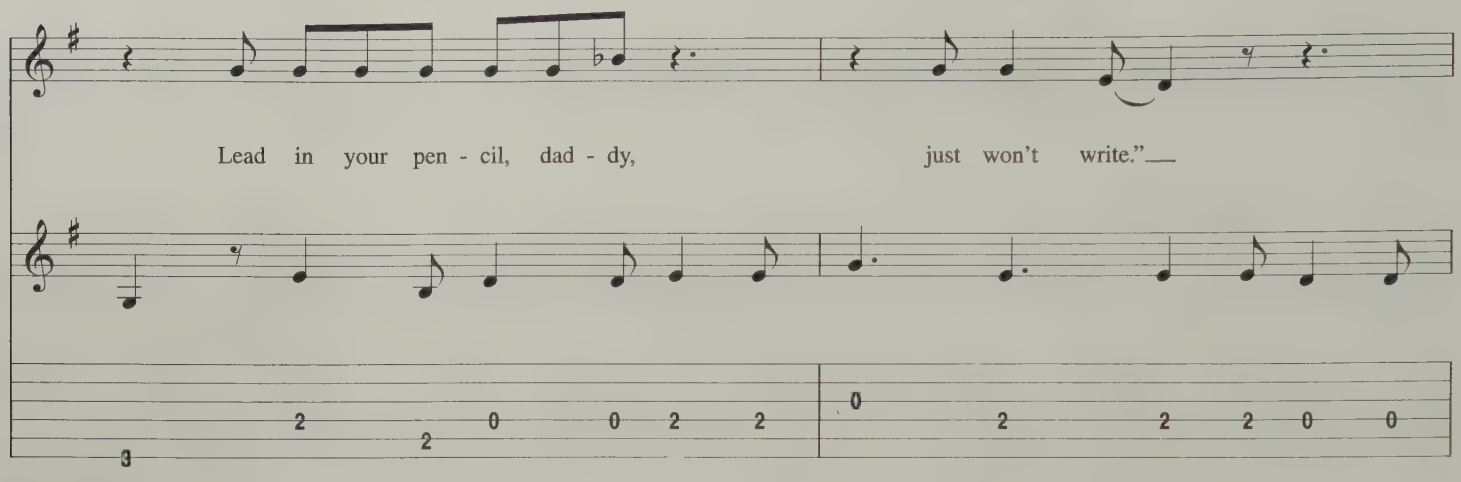



The wo - man I love
don't treat me right.
C7
(A7)
Lead in my pen - cil,
hey, this done gone bad.
Gtr. 1
Rhy. Fig. 2
End Rhy. Fig. 2
Gtr. 2
G
(E)
And it's the worst
1/2
1/4


D7
(B7)
E♭7
(C7)
D7
(B7)
— old feel - in', ba - by, —
that — I've ev - er had. —

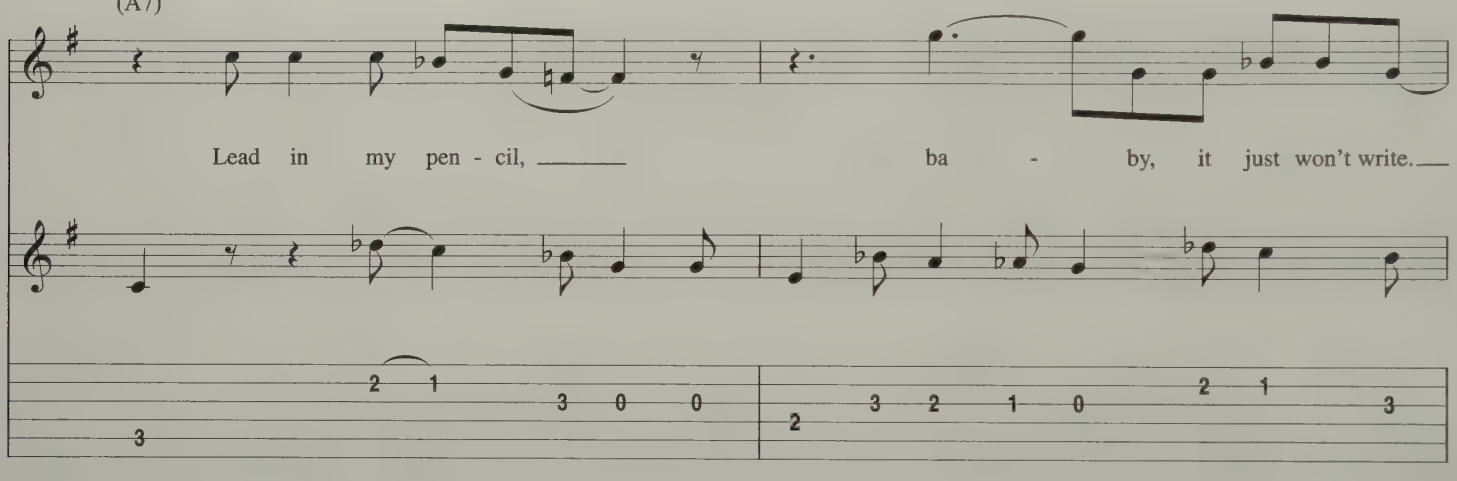

G
(E)
D7
(B7)
2. I
3. My
1/2
1/4





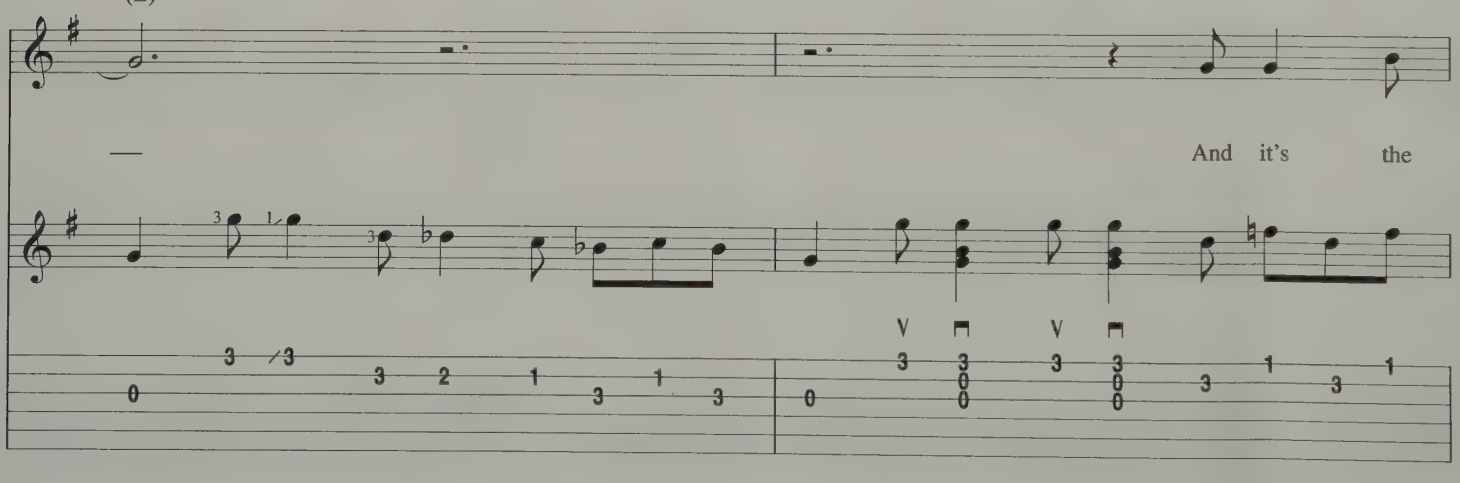
Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 2, simile

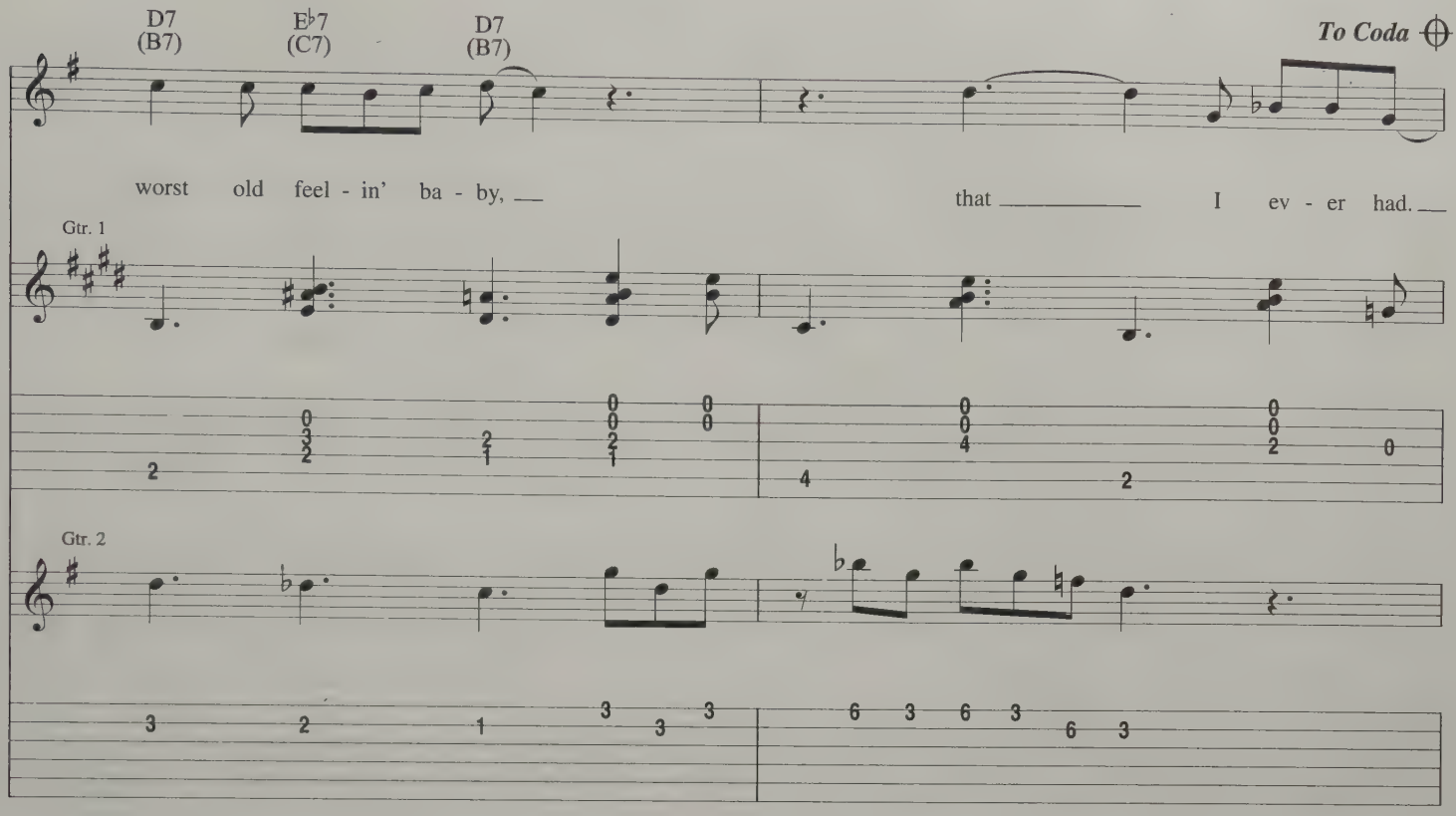
C7
(A7)

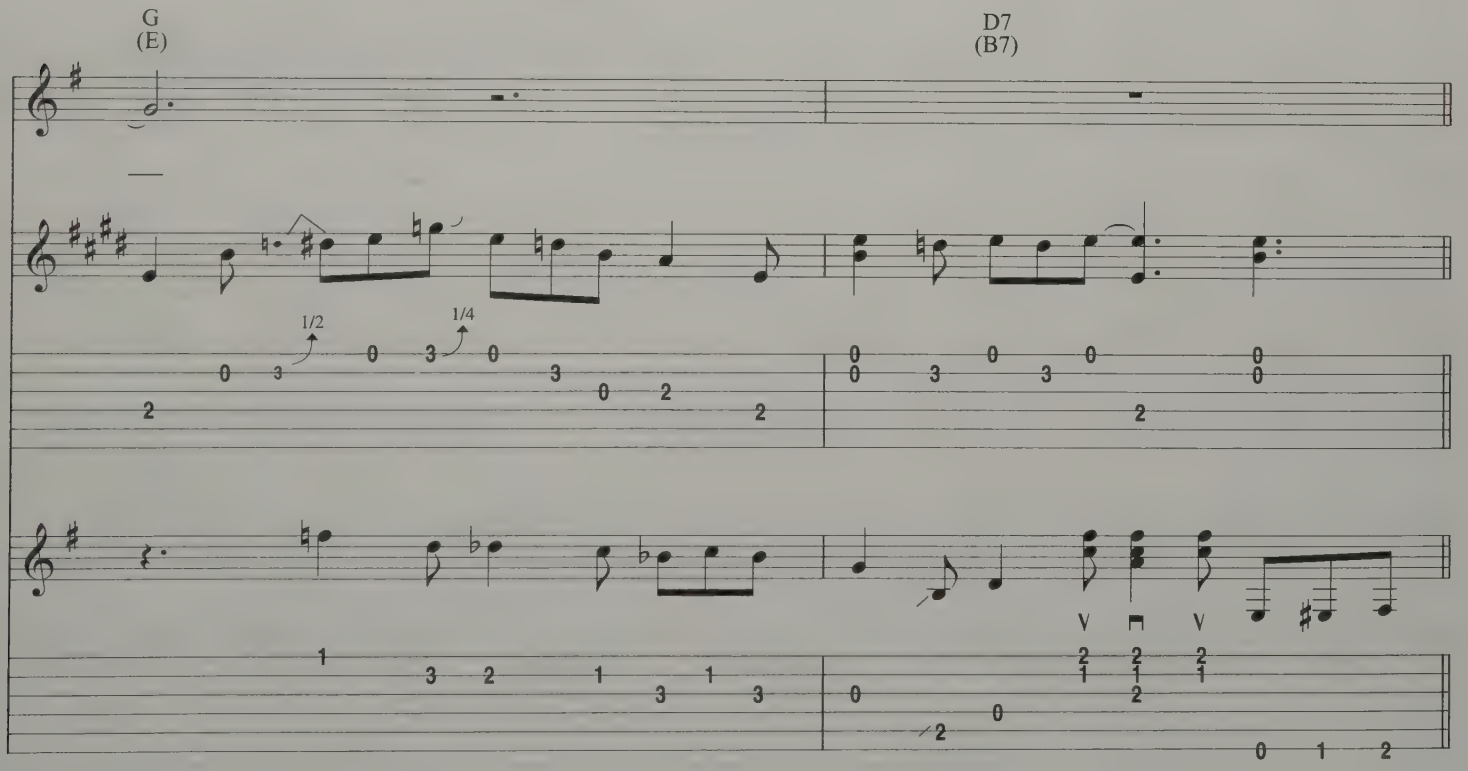


Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1, last 2 meas., simile

G
(E)

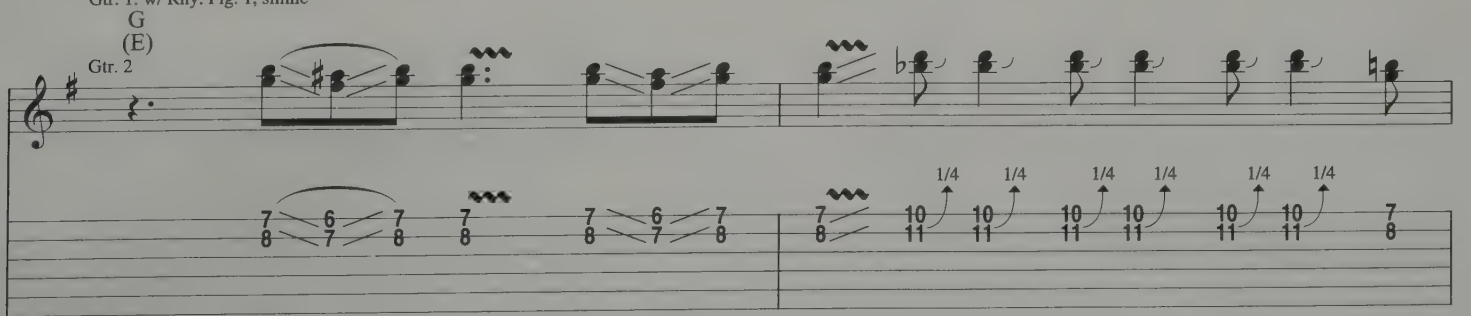


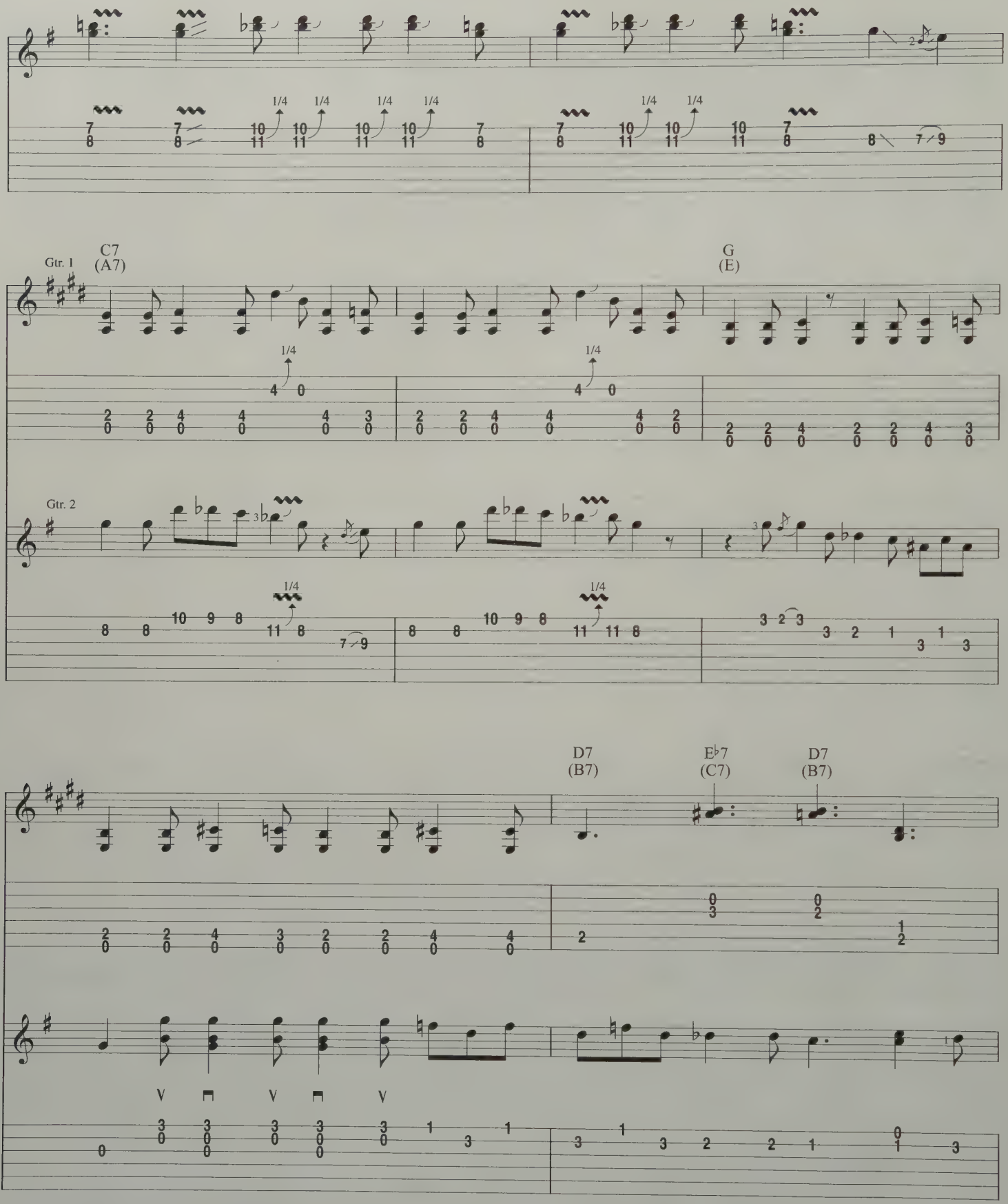


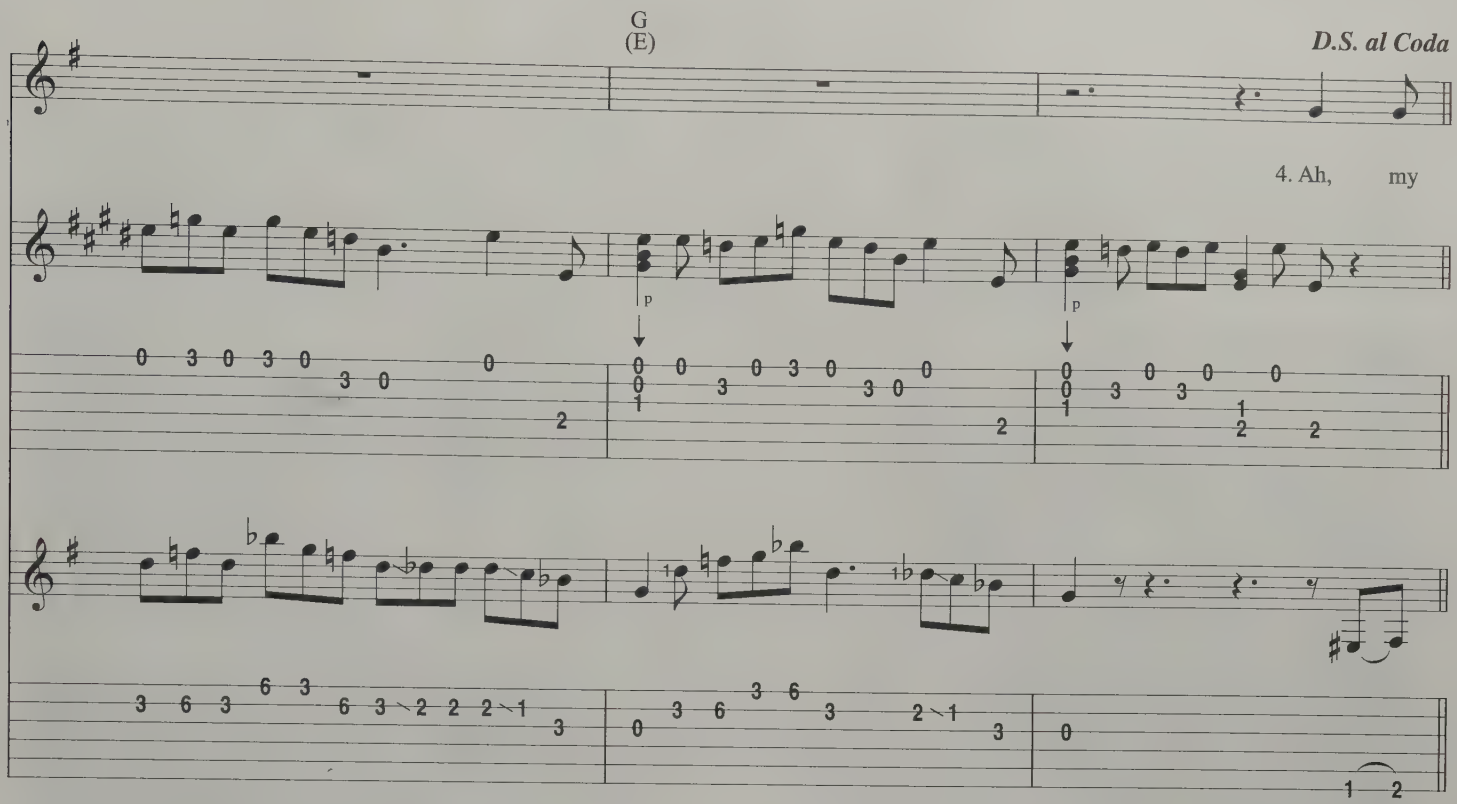


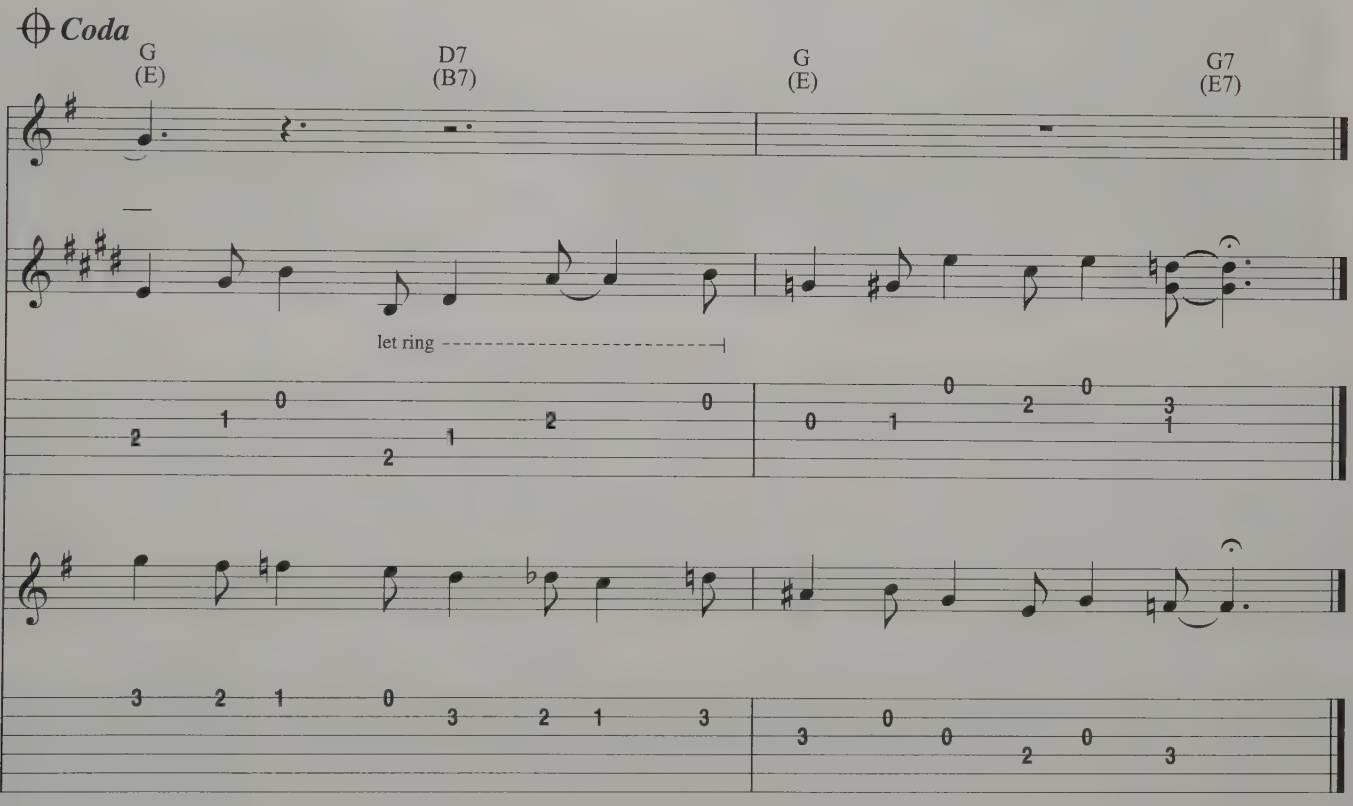
Guitar Solo

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1, simile




Gtr. 1
C7
(A7)
G
(E)
Gtr. 2
D7
(B7)
E♭7
(C7)
D7
(B7)





Additional Lyrics

2. I woke up this mornin', my baby said she's mighty mad,
'Cause the lead in my pencil is done gone bad.
Lead in my pencil, baby, it's done gone bad.
And that's the worst old feelin' that I've ever had.

4. Ah, my baby said she's going to quit me,
I tell you for this reason why.
Lead in my pencil goin' bye bye.
Lay down last night, couldn't help but cry.
Want to write so bad, I's about to die.
Lead in my pencil, baby, it's done gone bad.
And that's the worst old feelin', baby, that I've ever had.

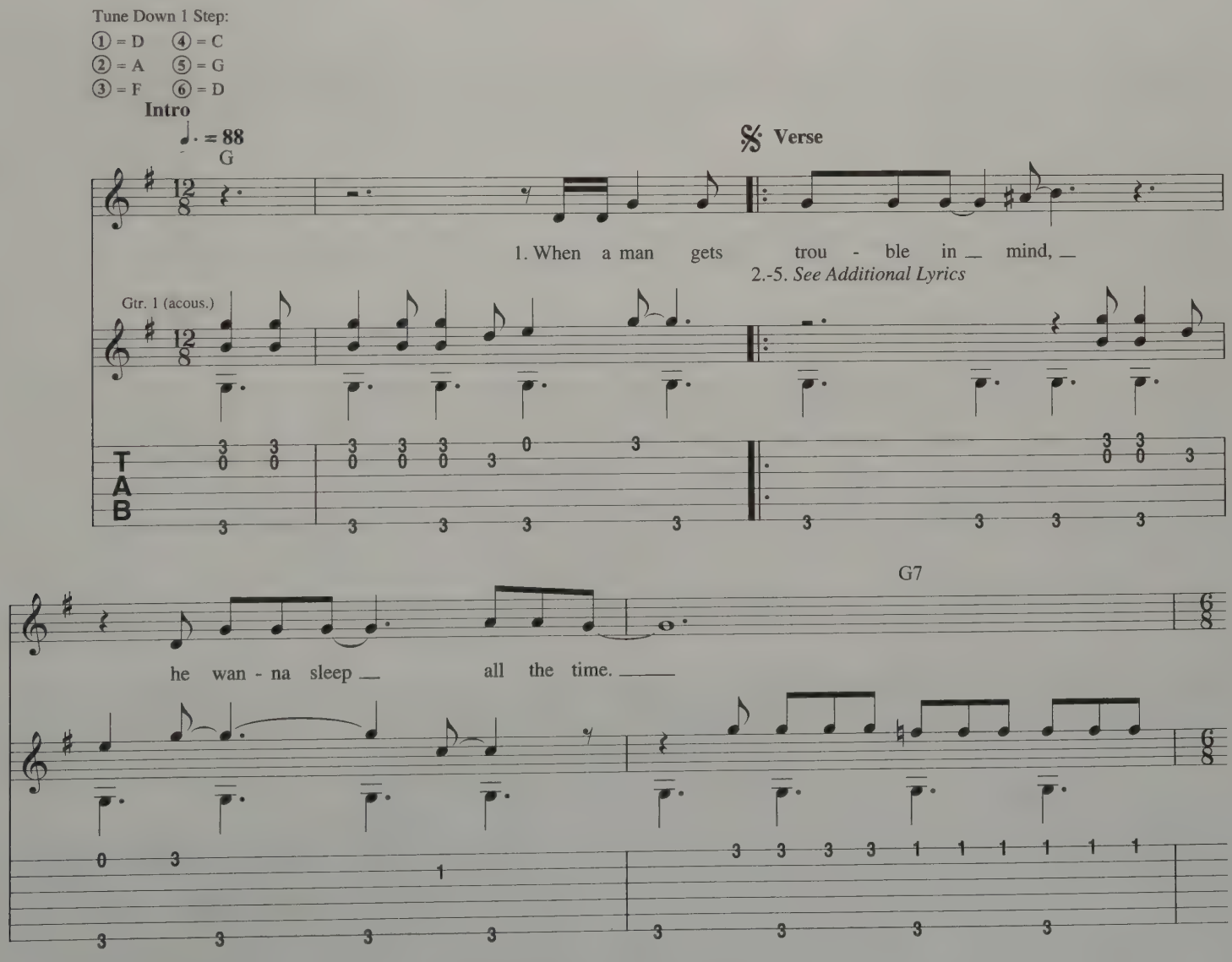
Booker White: White had a ferocious slide guitar attack to match his gruff vocals.

SLEEPY MAN BLUES

Booker White (1906–1977)

Booker "Bukka" T. Washington White was a powerful singer and slide guitarist who first recorded for Victor in 1930 and then had the good fortune to cap a long recording and performing career via the sixties Blues Revival. Like Son House, he was "rediscovered" by a white blues scholar and guitarist, John Fahey, in the early sixties. His legacy is long and includes "Aberdeen Mississippi Blues," "Black Cat Bone Blues," "Parchman Farm Blues," "Shake 'em On Down" and "Sic 'em Dogs On." In addition, he had a cousin named Riley King (B.B.) who went on to win some fame as well.

"Sleepy Man Blues" has a melody similar to "Love in Vain Blues," though both compositions are most likely based on Leroy Carr's " When the Sun Goes Down." Though in standard tuning and played in what would be the key of G, White's guitar is tuned down a full step to F. In characteristic Delta blues style, the I–IV–V chord changes are often indicated with a bass note and a treble—or melody—note on the top strings. The listener's ear tends to imagine the middle register, especially when the singer's voice fills this void. Try playing these forms (as found in measures 1–4) with the thumb fretting the low E string and the index finger fretting the high E string. The IV (C) chord will require conventional folk chord fingerings, but the V (D) chord fingering could be played with the thumb remaining on string 6 while the index finger catches the notes on strings 1 and 2.



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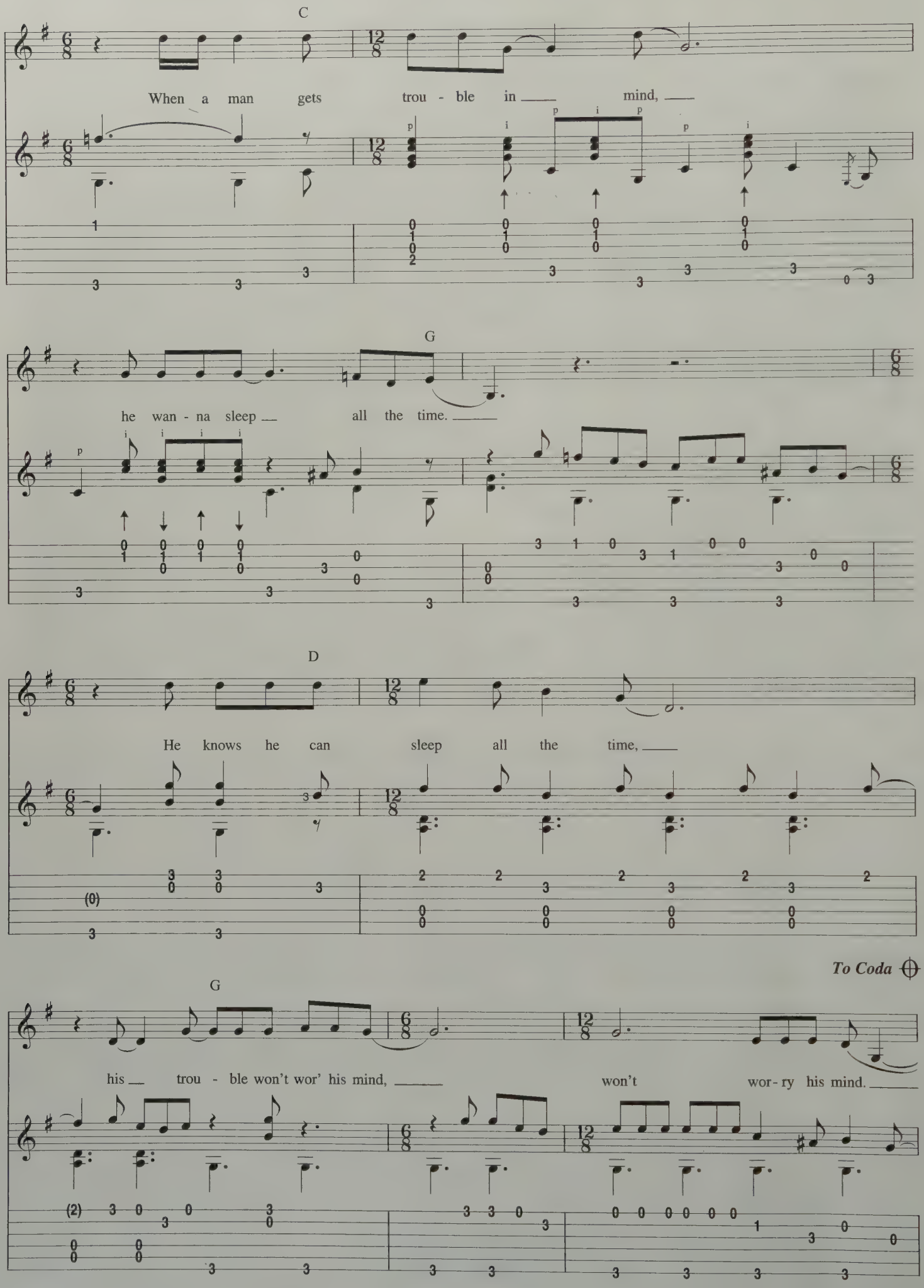
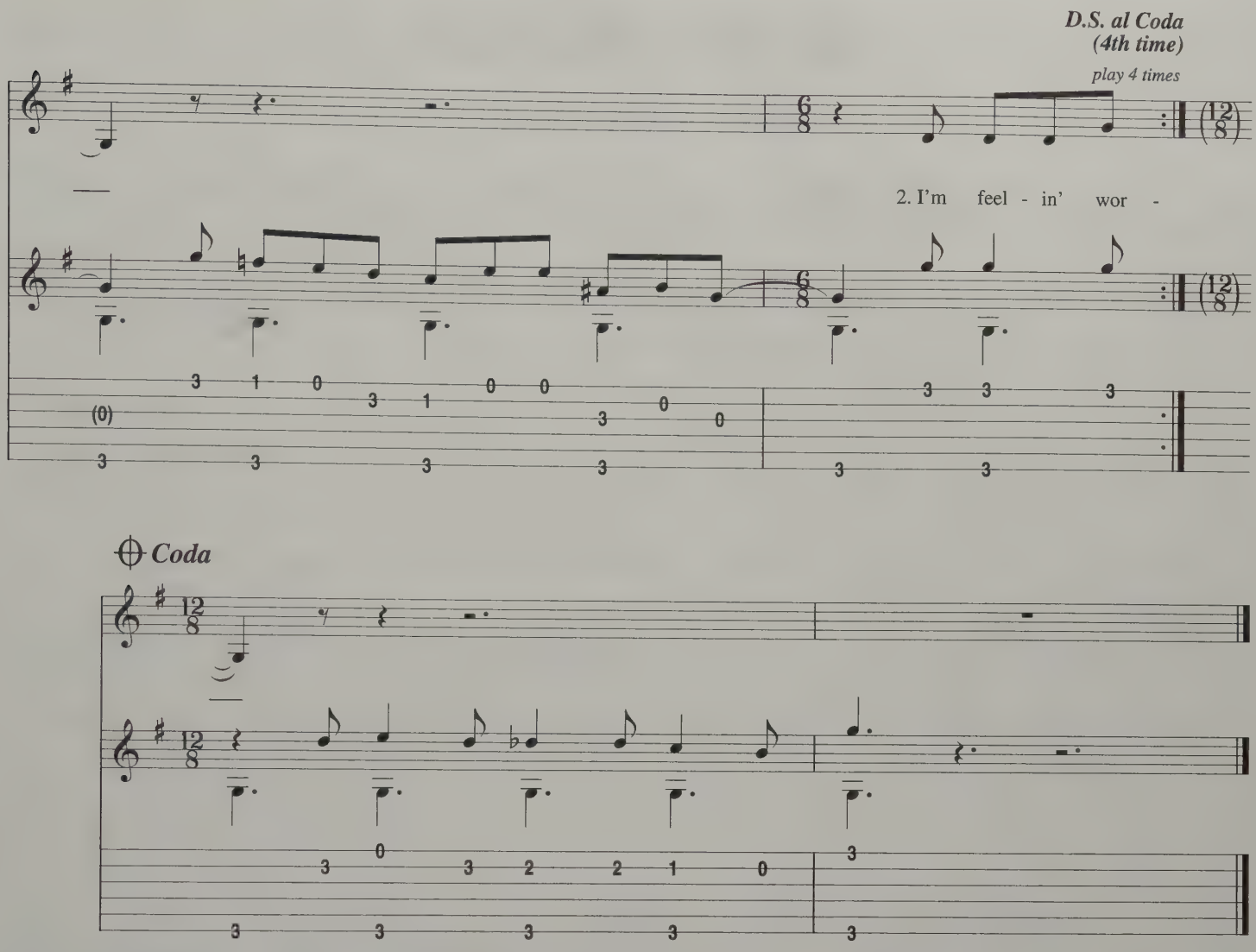

C
When a man gets trou - ble in mind,
G
he wan - na sleep all the time.
D
He knows he can sleep all the time,
To Coda
G
his trou - ble won't wor' his mind, won't wor - ry his mind.



Additional Lyrics

2. I'm feelin' worried in mind and I'm tryin' a keep from cryin'.
   I'm feelin' worried in mind and I'm tryin' a keep from cryin'.
   I am standing into sunshine to keep from weaknin' down,
   keep from weaknin' down.

3. I want somewhere to go, but I hate to go to town.
   I want somewhere to go to satisfy my mind.
   I would go to town, but I hate to stand around,
   hate to stand around.

4. I wonder what's the matter with my right mind,
   my mind keep me sleeping all a time.
   I' wonder what's the matter with my right mind,
   my mind keep me sleeping all a time.
   But when I had plenty money, my friend would come around,
   would come around.

5. If I had my right mind, I would write my woman a few lines.
   If I had my right mind, I would write my woman a few lines.
   I will do most anything, to keep from weaknin' down,
   keep from weaknin' down.

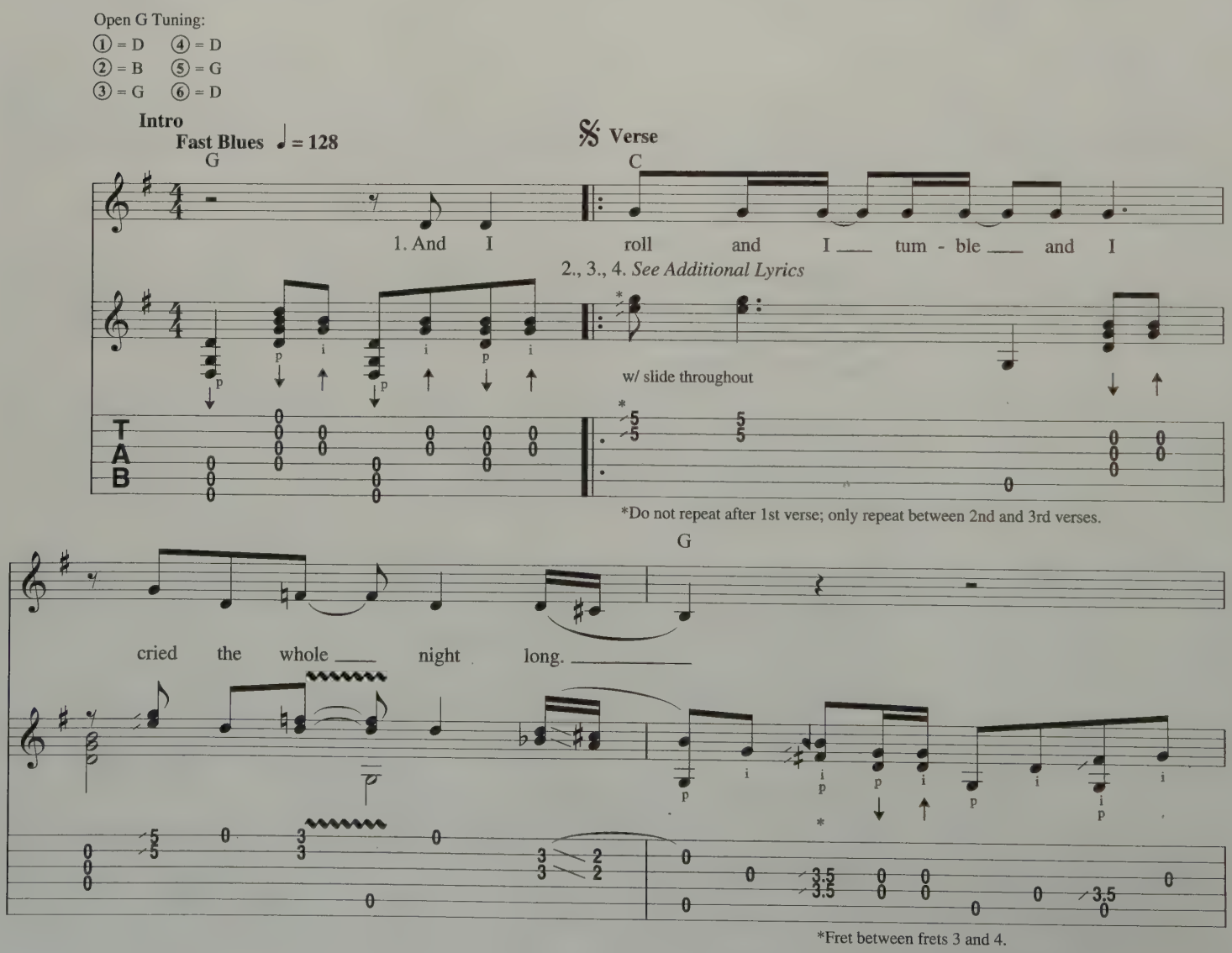
ROLL AND TUMBLE BLUES

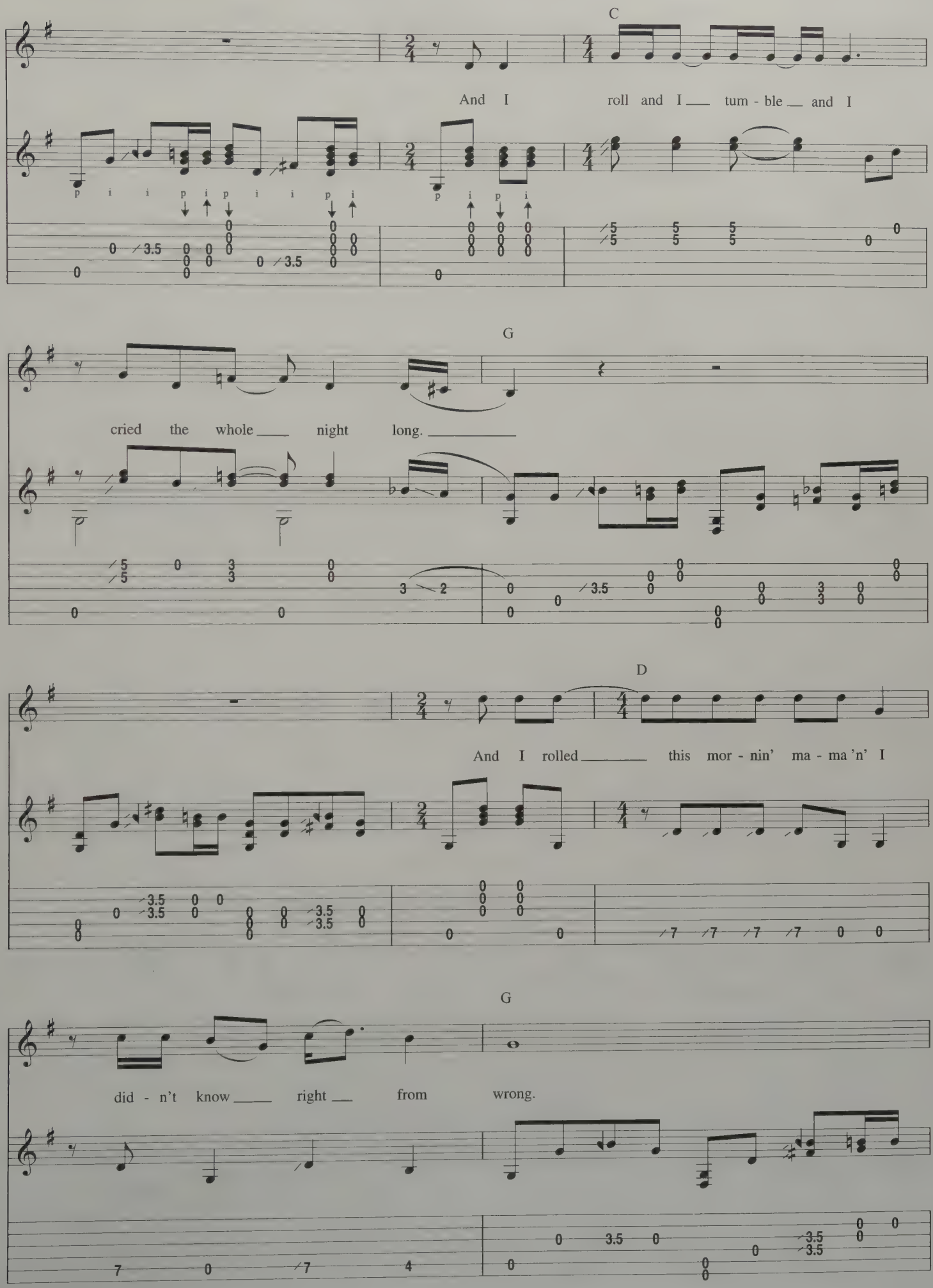
Hambone Willie Newbern

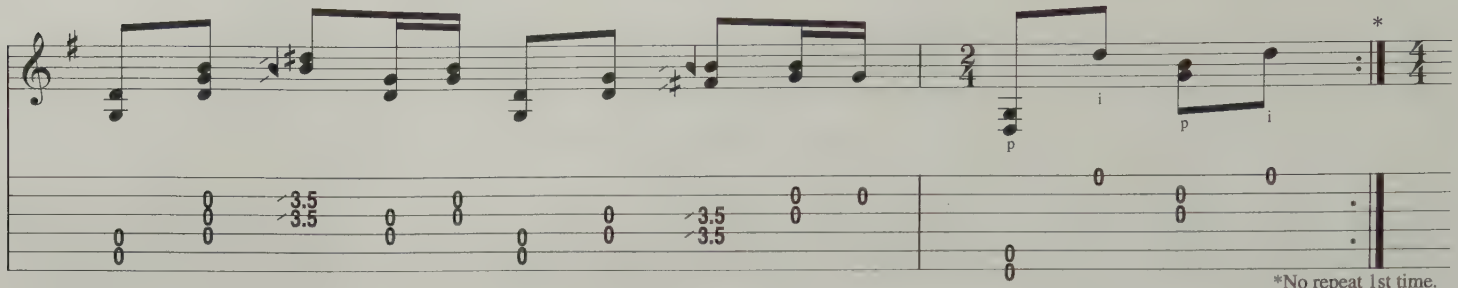
The mysterious Hambone Willie Newbern is known for his mentoring of Sleepy John Estes and the "rough and tumble" life he led in the pre-War South. He recorded six sides for Okeh Records in 1929: "She Could Toodle-Oo," "Nobody Knows (What the Good Deacon Does)," "Way Down in Arkansas," "Hambone Willie's Dreamy-Eyed Woman's Blues," "Roll and Tumble Blues," and "Shelby County Workhouse Blues." His songs were reportedly autobiographical and it is rumored that he was beaten to death in prison during the forties.

His "Roll and Tumble Blues" was based on a traditional Delta theme and is its first recording. Both "If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day" and "Traveling Riverside Blues" owe a debt to Newbern's song. The 14-measure verse (15 if you count the final measure of the I chord in 2/4 time) is unusual inasmuch as it begins on the IV (C) chord, alternating in two-measure increments with the I (G) chord for ten measures before changing to the V (D) chord in measure 11. The effect is one of heightened forward motion that continues unabated from verse to verse.

The "hook" of the piece is based around the G triad located on the open strings and the musical tension provided by a quick jump to the B♭/F (♭3rd and ♭7th) double-stop at fret 3 (fret 3.5 to be precise). As many country blues guitarists do in open G or A, Newbern moves his slide to fret 5 for the IV chord and fret 7 for the V chord.

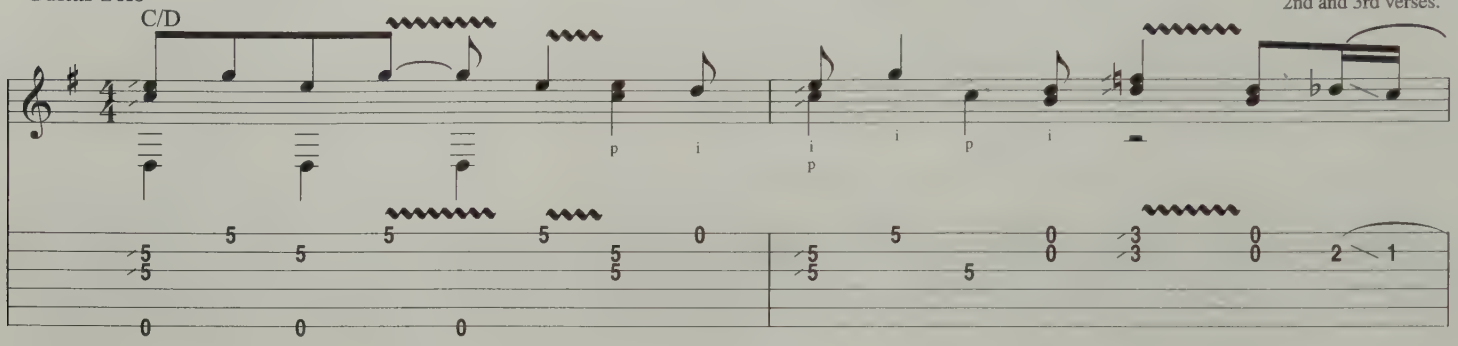


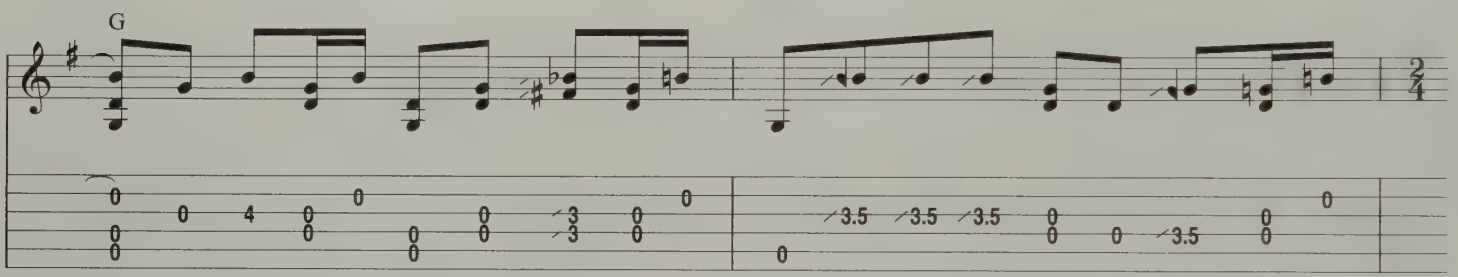

C
And I roll and I tum - ble and I
G
cried the whole night long.
D
And I rolled this mor - nin' ma - ma 'n' I
G
did - n't know right from wrong.

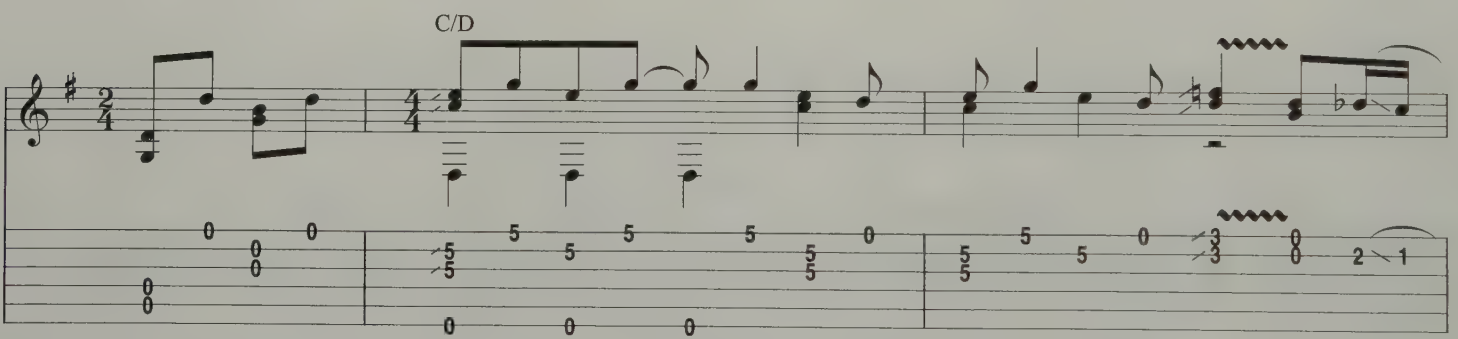


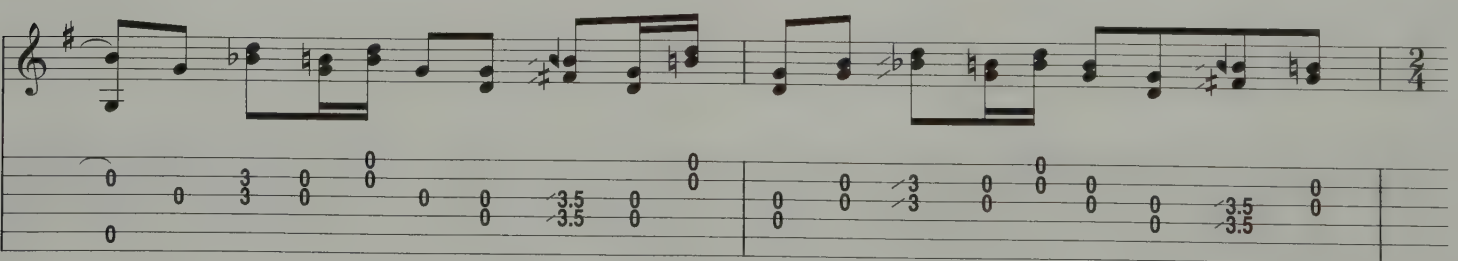
*No repeat 1st time.
Only repeat between
2nd and 3rd verses.

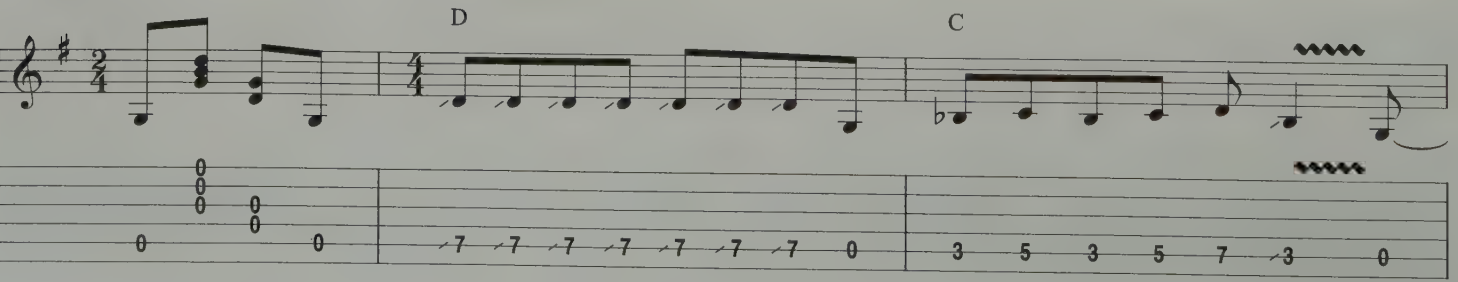
Guitar Solo

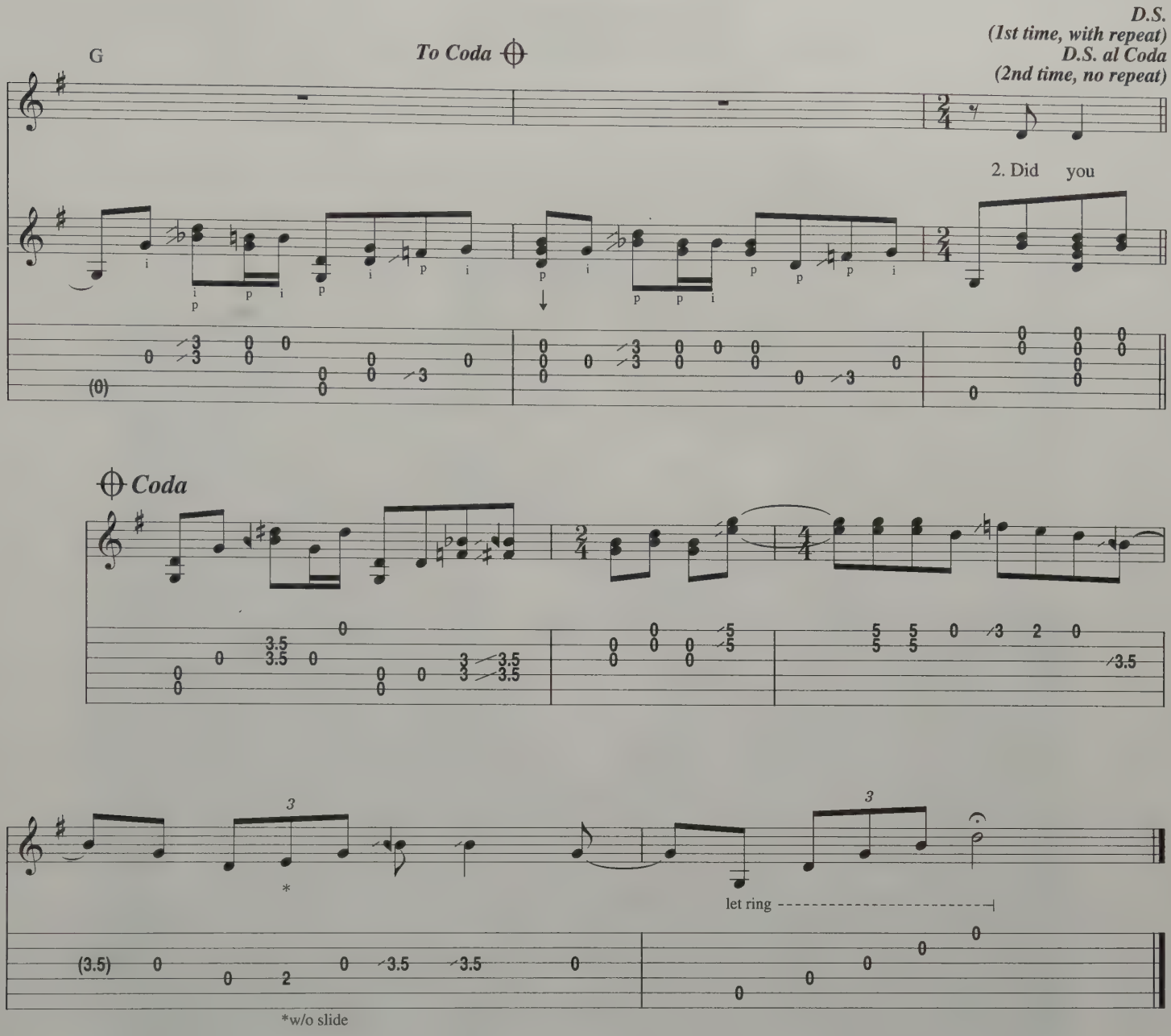












Additional Lyrics

2. Did you ever wake up and find your dough roller gone?
Did you ever wake up and find your dough roller gone?
And you wring your hands and you cry the whole day long.

3. And I told my woman, Lord, 'fore I left the town.
And I told my woman just before I left the town,
"Don't you let nobody tear a barrelhouse down."

4. And I fold my arms, Lord, and I walked away.
And I fold my arms and I slowly walked away.
Said, "That's all right sweet mama, your trouble gon' come some day."

Lonnie Johnson: Though still relatively obscure, Johnson is one of the most influential guitarists of the century.

LIFE SAVER BLUES

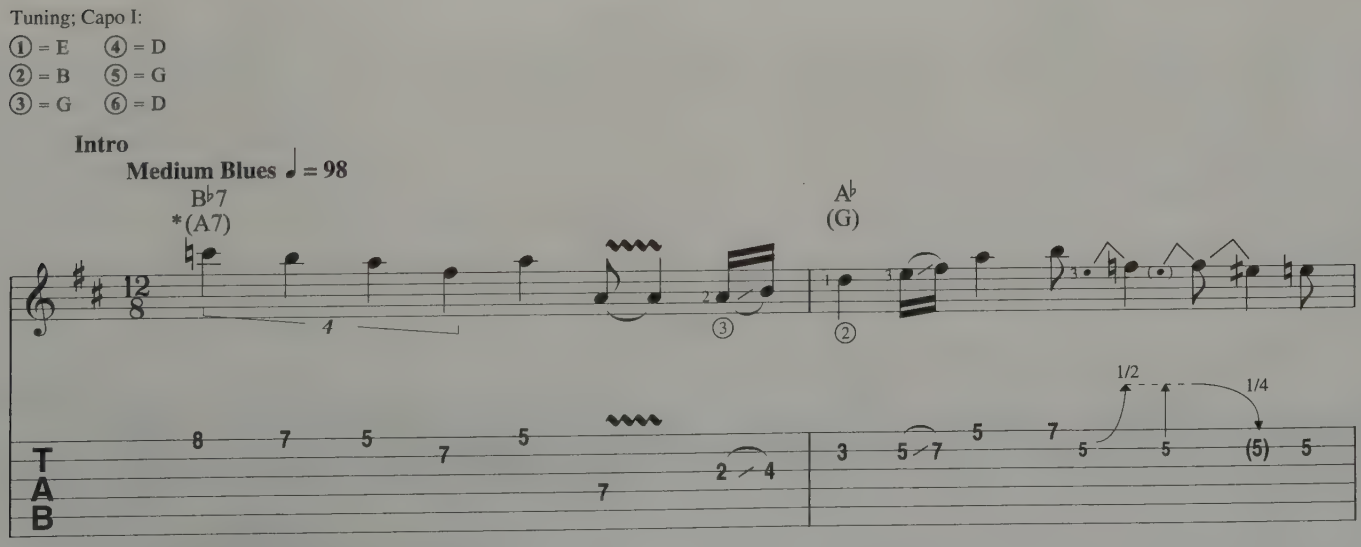
Lonnie Johnson (1899–1970)

Alonzo "Lonnie" Johnson is perhaps the most underrated blues guitarist of all time. With a career that stretched from pre-Delta country blues in the mid-twenties to the Blues Revival in the sixties, he was there at the birth of recorded blues and lived to see it flourish and mutate to rock 'n' roll. He was an exceptionally gifted guitarist who pioneered fleet single-string lines and swinging jazz chording with Eddie Lang, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington, among many others. In the twenties and thirties he was a popular recording artist with influence everywhere in the black community, a fact not lost on Robert Johnson (no relation). Robert was so captivated with Lonnie that he not only appropriated what he could from his guitar style, but also his name. On occasion he referred to himself as "Robert Lonnie" and apparently had the chops to back up the conceit.

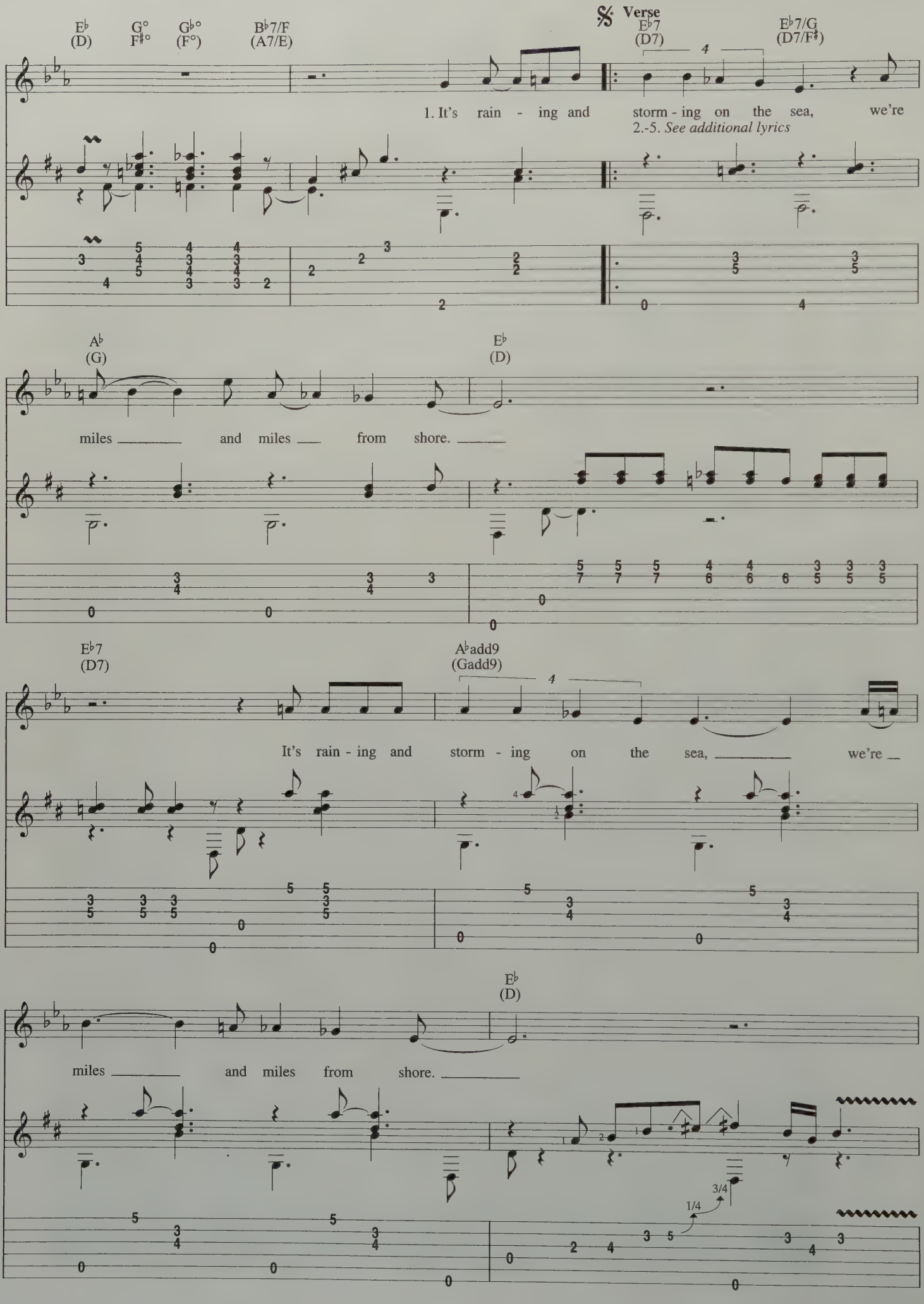
"Life Saver Blues" is the blueprint for "Drunken Hearted Man" and "Malted Milk." It is a fine example of the type of early urban blues that Lonnie influenced so heavily, with its fluid single-note fills interspersed seamlessly in between the chordal accompaniment. The Drop D and Drop G tuning allowed him to have open string root notes as a foundation for the I (D) and IV (G) chords.

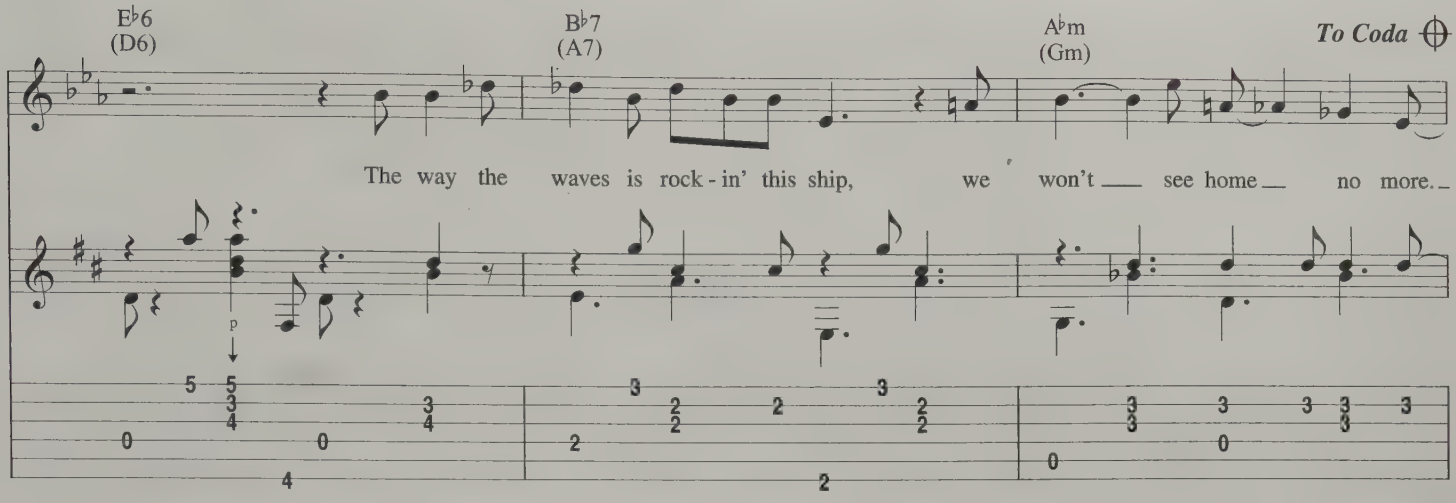
The two measures that proceed the solo show how Lonnie plays the octave D strings to establish the tonal center and follows up with a slick run employing the 9th (E) bent a bluesy 3/4 step, root (D), major 7th (C♯), 5th (A), ♭5th (A♭), and sus4 (G). In the second measure, he "answers" his single-note exclamation with a triple-stop D6 form on the top three strings. In measures 5 and 6 (IV) of the solo he thumps on the low open G string in quarter notes while he spins a solo line on top like a country bluesman. The sophisticated note choices include the 9th (A) and 6th (E), along with the more tasty 3/4 step bends.

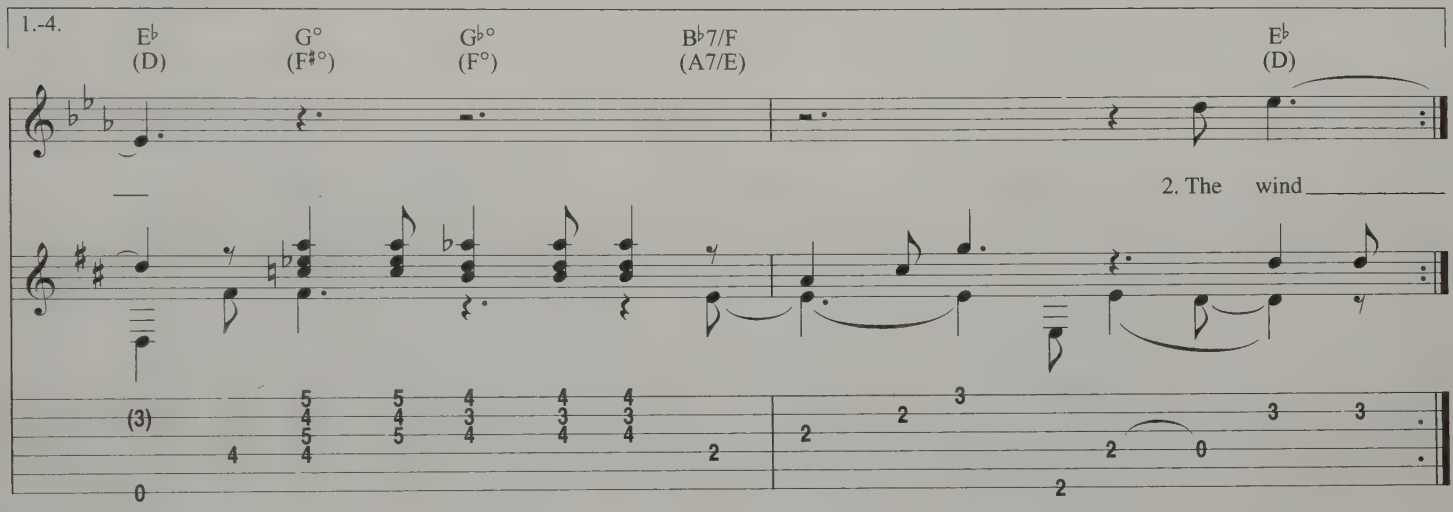
Note throughout that Lonnie studiously avoids the root position of the D blues scale at fret 10, instead working out of the lower, less-used positions. The result is a higher concentration of melodic (3rds, 5ths, 6ths, major 7ths) and extended blues harmony notes (9ths), as opposed to the over-used ♭3rd and root.

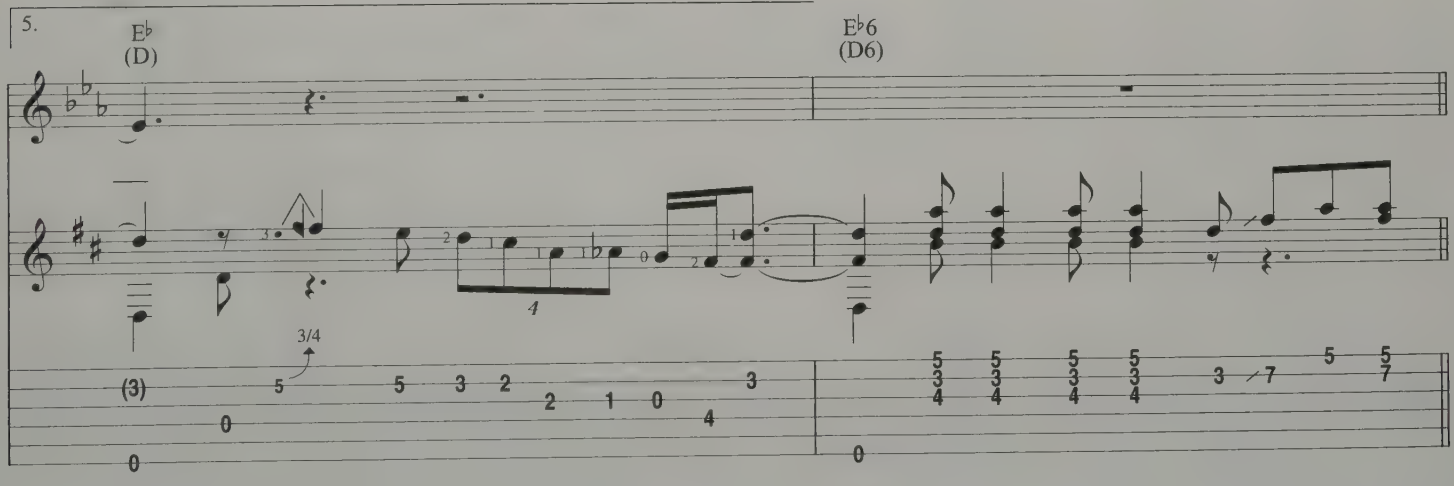


*Symbols in parentheses represent chord names respective to capoed guitar. Symbols above reflect actual sounding chord. Capoed fret is "0" in TAB.

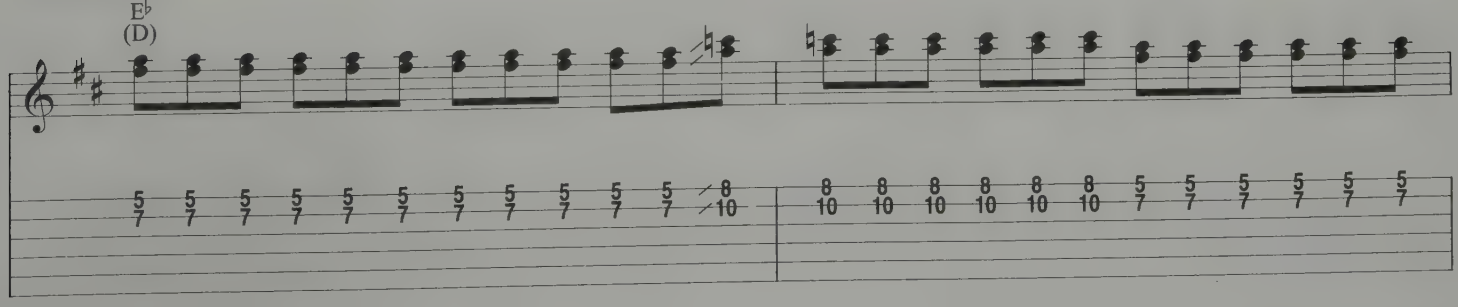

E♭ (D)
G° F♯° (F°)
G♭° (F°)
B♭7/F (A7/E)
𝄋 Verse
E♭7 (D7)
E♭7/G (D7/F♯)
1. It's rain - ing and storm - ing on the sea, we're
2.-5. See additional lyrics
A♭ (G)
E♭ (D)
miles and miles from shore.
E♭7 (D7)
A♭add9 (Gadd9)
It's rain - ing and storm - ing on the sea, we're
E♭ (D)
miles and miles from shore.
3/4
1/4

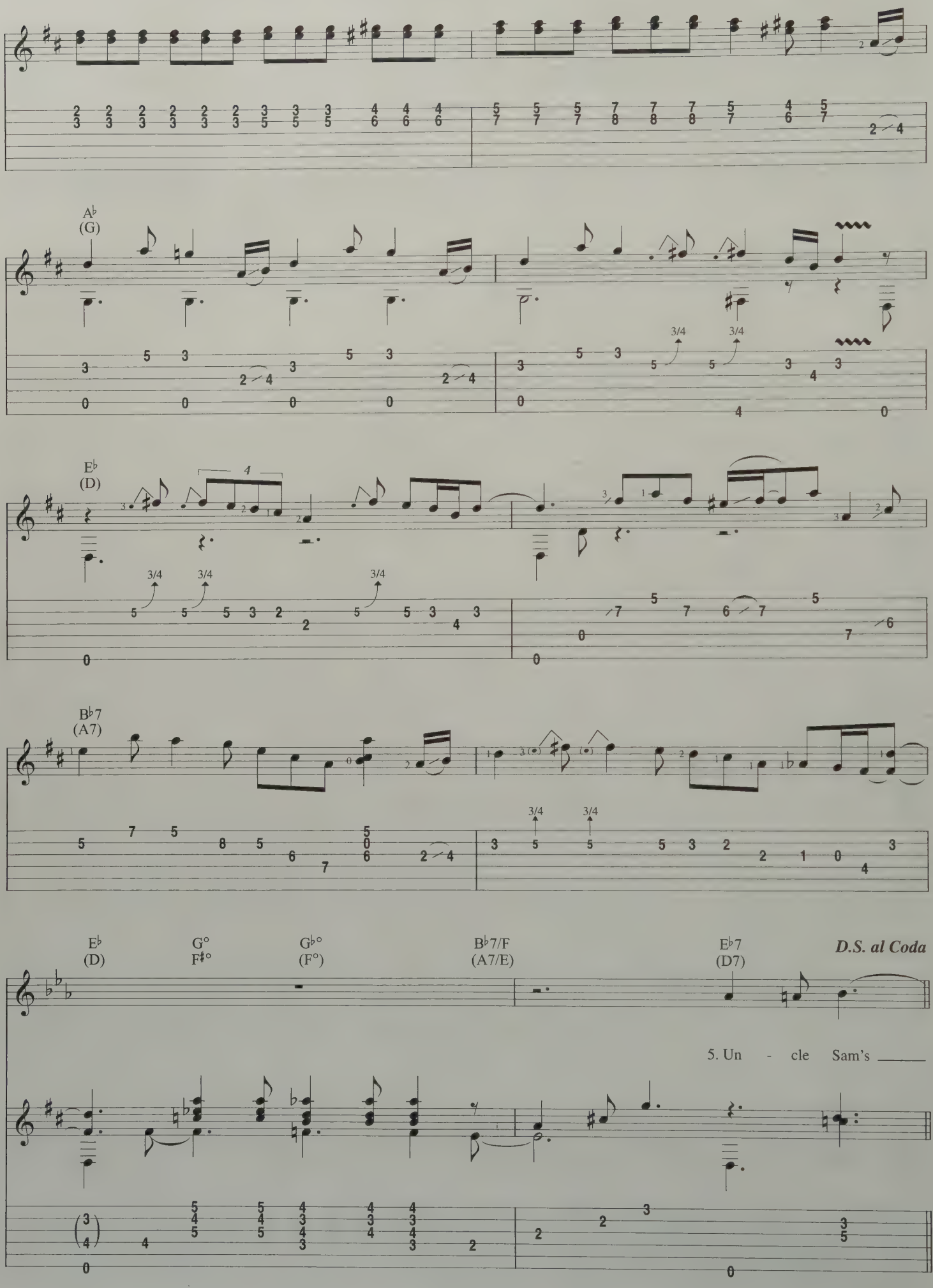

E♭6
(D6)
B♭7
(A7)
A♭m
(Gm)
To Coda
The way the waves is rock - in' this ship, we won't ___ see home ___ no more. ___
p

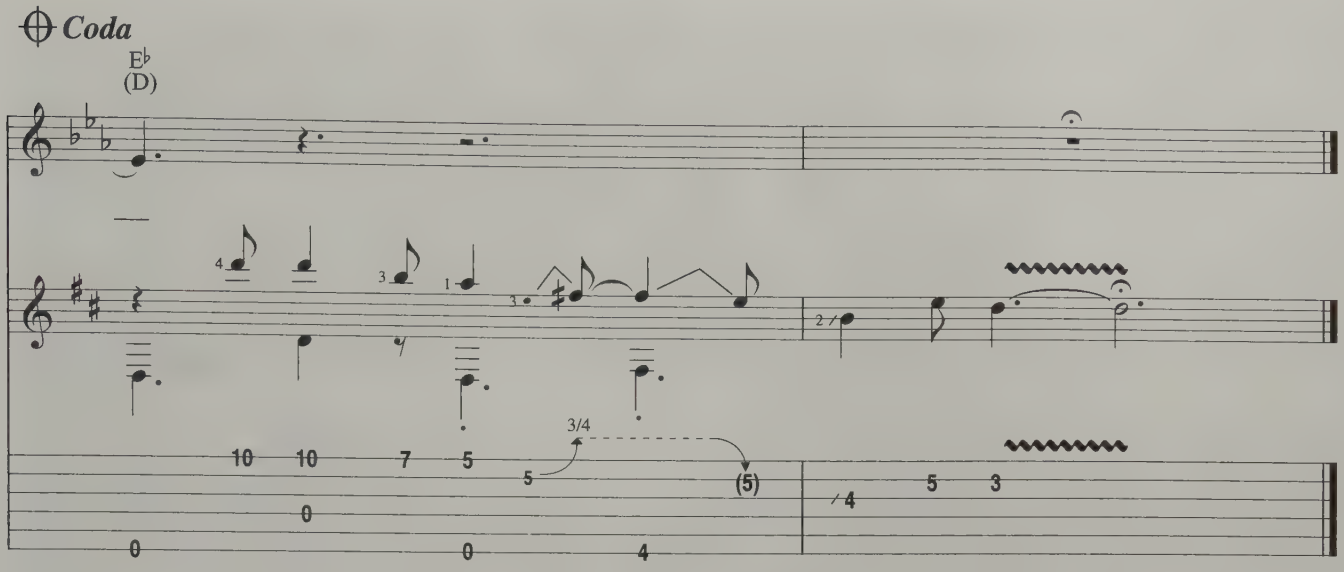

1.-4.
E♭
(D)
G°
(F♯°)
G♭°
(F°)
B♭7/F
(A7/E)
E♭
(D)
2. The wind ___


5.
E♭
(D)
E♭6
(D6)
3/4

Guitar Solo


E♭
(D)


A♭
(G)
E♭
(D)
B♭7
(A7)
E♭
(D)
G°
F♯°
G♭°
(F°)
B♭7/F
(A7/E)
E♭7
(D7)
D.S. al Coda
5. Un - cle Sam's



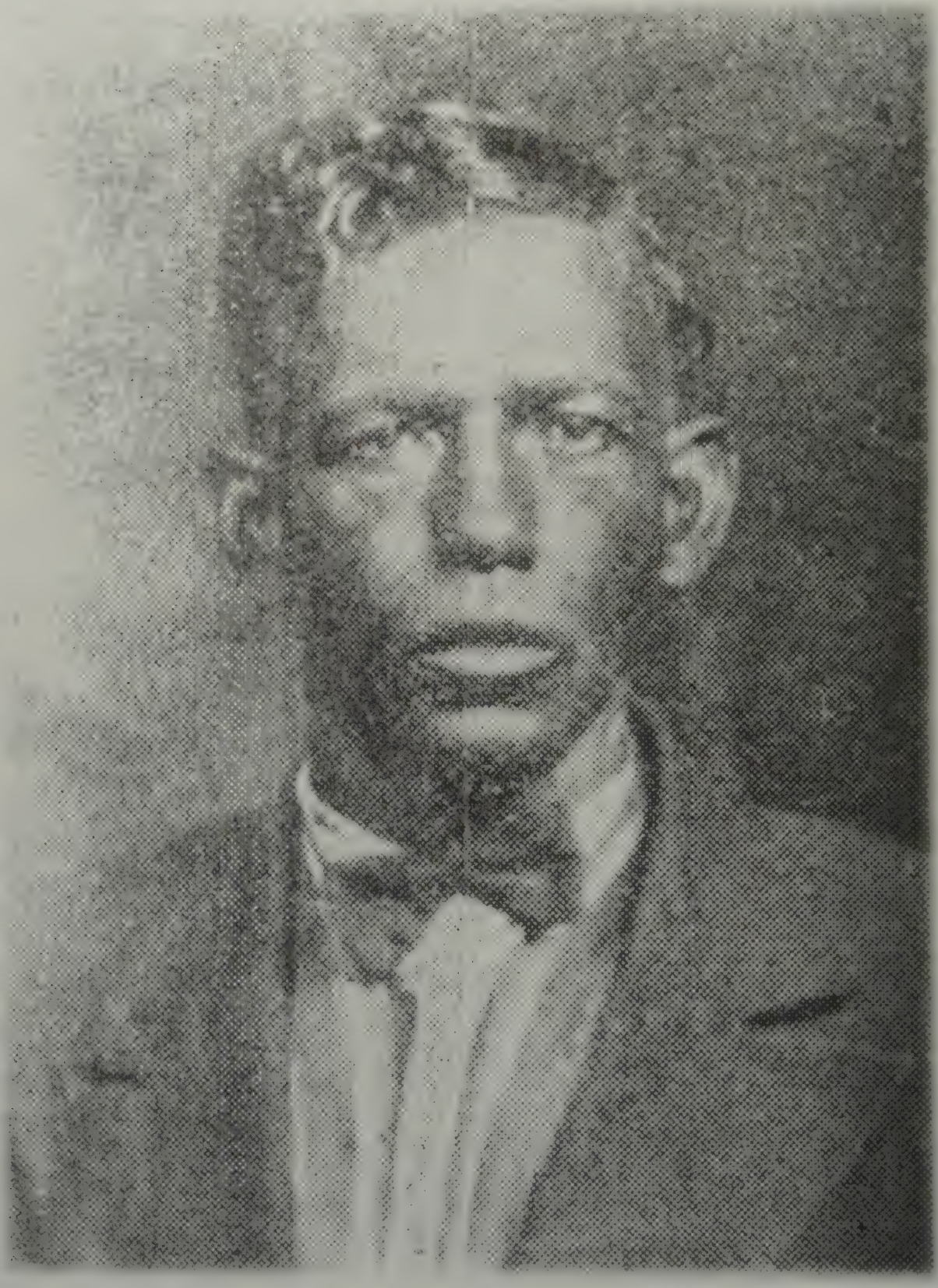
Additional Lyrics

2. The wind is so strong, turnin' this old ship 'round and 'round.
   This waves is so strong, turning this old ship 'round and 'round.
   Something tells me, won't be long before we're sinkin' down.

3. The captain say, "Get your life savers, fasten them around your waist."
   Captain say, "Get your life savers, and fasten them around your waist.
   Because we're sinking down and the lifeboat is your safest place."

4. And we floated all night long in the storm, lost miles and miles from shore.
   And the water was freezin', and the rain began to pour.
   I say, "Girls and boys let's pray, 'cause we won't see home no more."

5. Uncle Sam's ship was comin', painted in red, white, and blue.
   Uncle Sam's ship was comin', painted in red, white, and blue.
   We say, "We live in New York City. Red, white, and blue brought us all the way through."



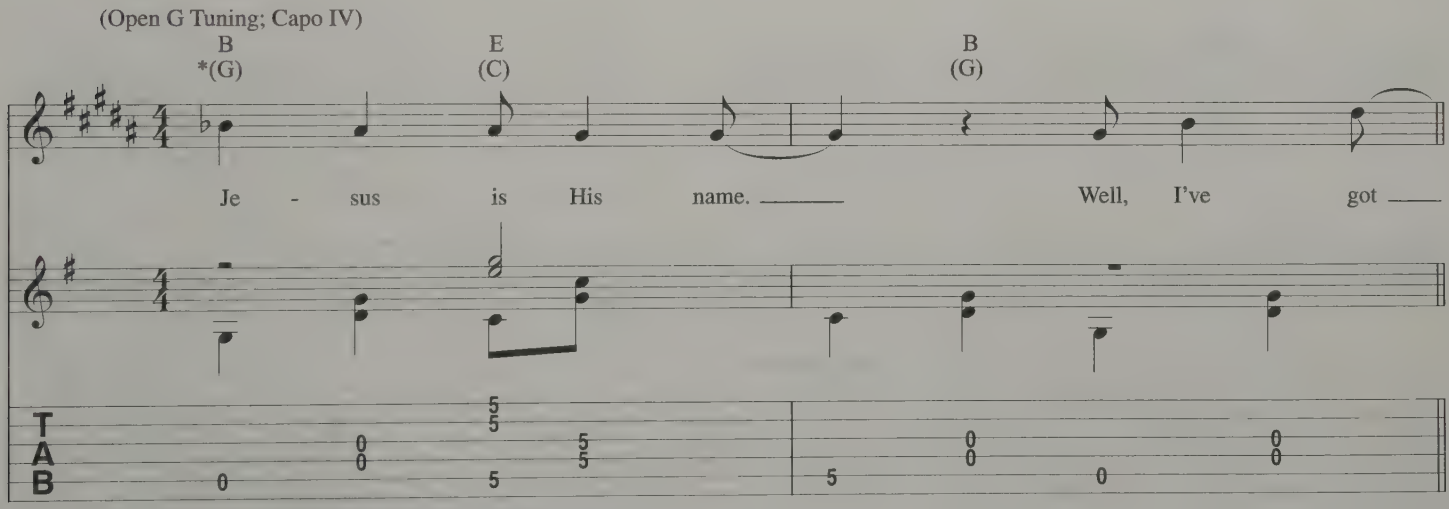
Charley Patton: Delta blues begins with Patton, who often "clowned" with the guitar behind his head.

YOU GONNA NEED SOMEONE WHEN YOU DIE

Charley Patton (1891–1934)

Charley Patton is generally considered to be the "Founder of Delta Blues." Though he was not the first Delta blues guitarist to record—having been preceded by Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Willie Johnson, and others—his sessions from 1929, 1930, and 1934 produced a highly influential body of work, one that reached Robert Johnson, Son House, Howlin' Wolf, Tommy Johnson, Bukka White, Johnny Shines, and Muddy Waters. Playing slide and conventional fretting in open and standard tunings, Patton waxed immortal on "Mississippi Bo Weavil Blues," "Screamin' and Hollerin' the Blues," "Pony Blues," "Banty Rooster Blues," "Spoonful Blues," "High Water Everywhere," and "Pea Vine Blues," to name just a few. Possessing a rough, raw voice, Patton had enough chops to "clown" with the guitar as he played behind his head and banged on the body for percussive effects. His early death deprived the blues world of one of its most singular artists.

"You Gonna Need Someone When You Die" is the working model for "Last Fair Deal Gone Down." Though essentially a one-chord (I) romp in Open G tuning, Patton occasionally throws in a reference to the IV (C) chord in measures 11 and 12 by placing his slide at fret 5, as in this excerpt from the third verse:



* Symbols in parentheses represent chord names respective to capoed guitar. Symbols above reflect actual sounding chord. Capoed fret is "O" in TAB.

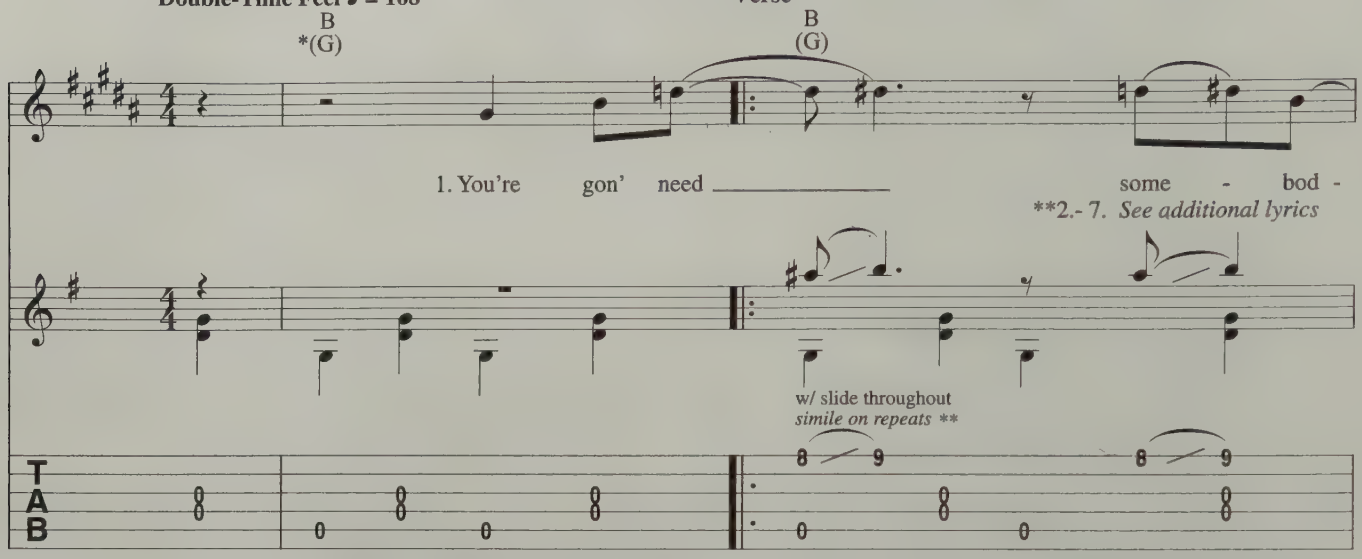
"You Gonna Need Someone When You Die" is rhythmically a simple song, with a "boom chuck" pattern of the root G (open fifth string) alternating with the D and high G strings (open fourth and third strings, respectively). Nonetheless, it is a good example of that straight, 4/4 Delta pulse with a melody overlaid either right on the quarter-note beat or in between as an eighth note. Use your thumb on the downstrokes to access the open strings.

Open G Tuning; Capo IV:
① = D ④ = D
② = B ⑤ = G
③ = G ⑥ = D

Intro

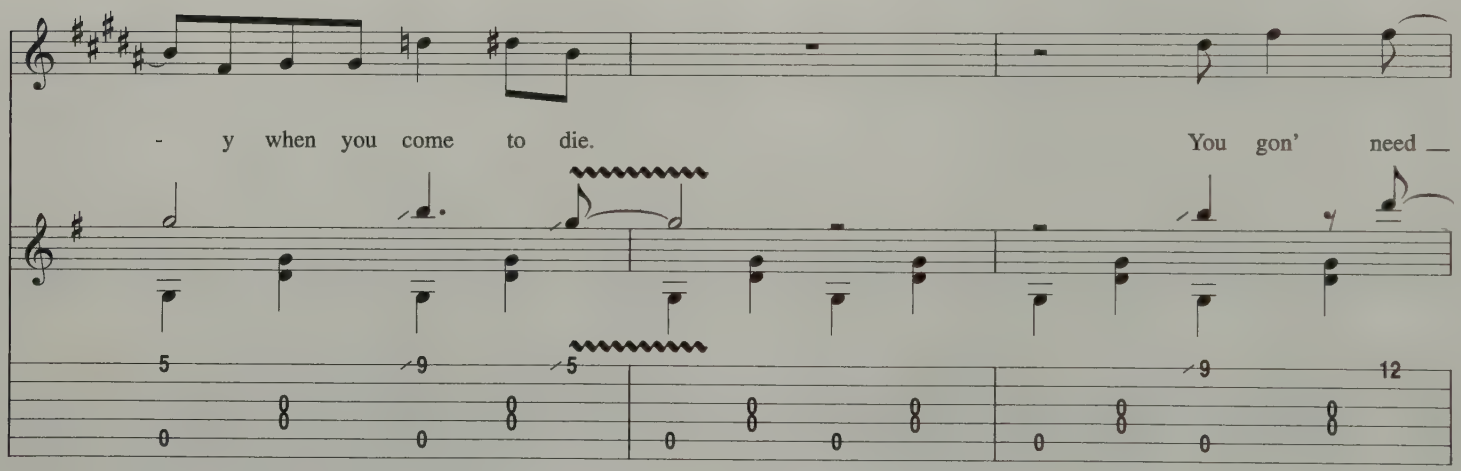
Double-Time Feel ♩ = 168

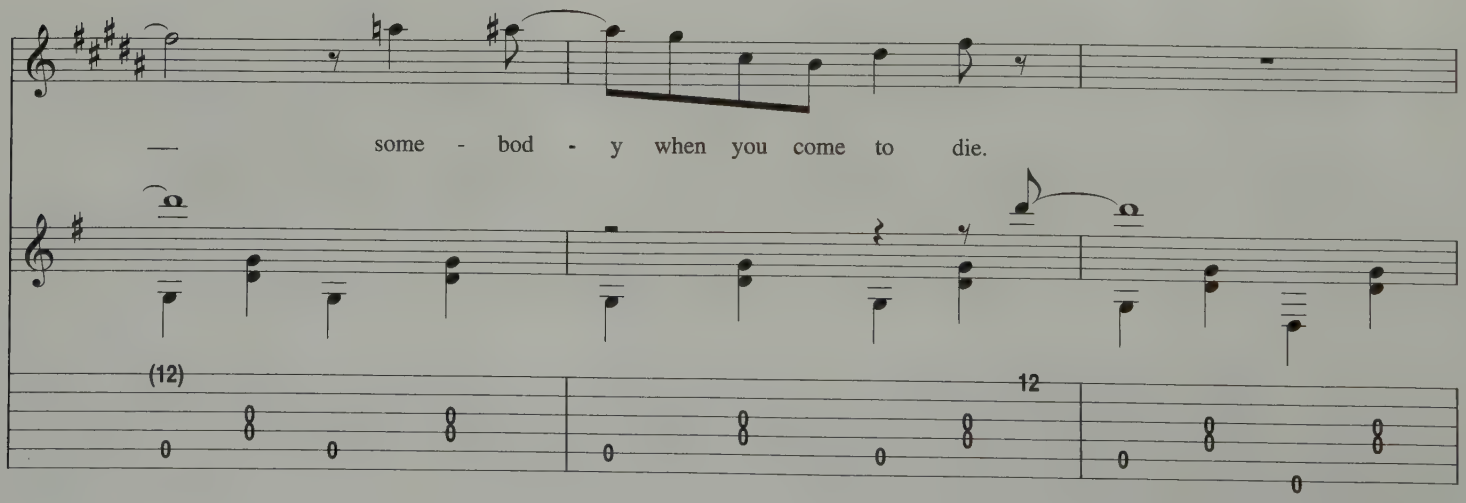
Verse

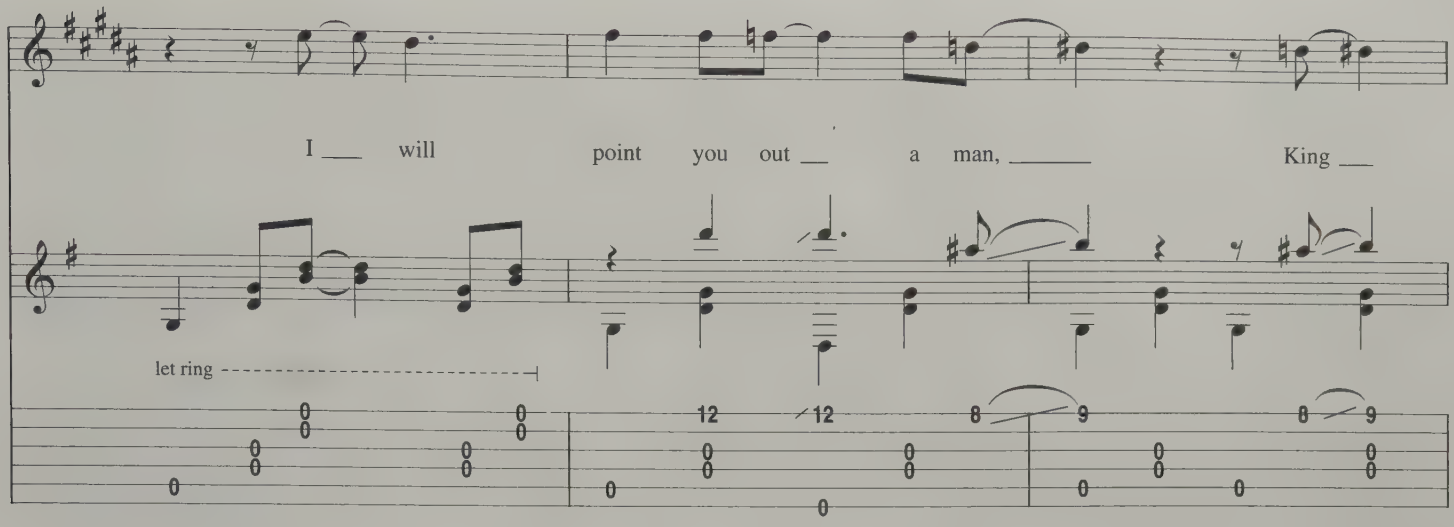


*Symbols in parentheses represent chord names respective to capoed guitar. Symbols above reflect actual sounding chord. Capoed fret is "O" in TAB.

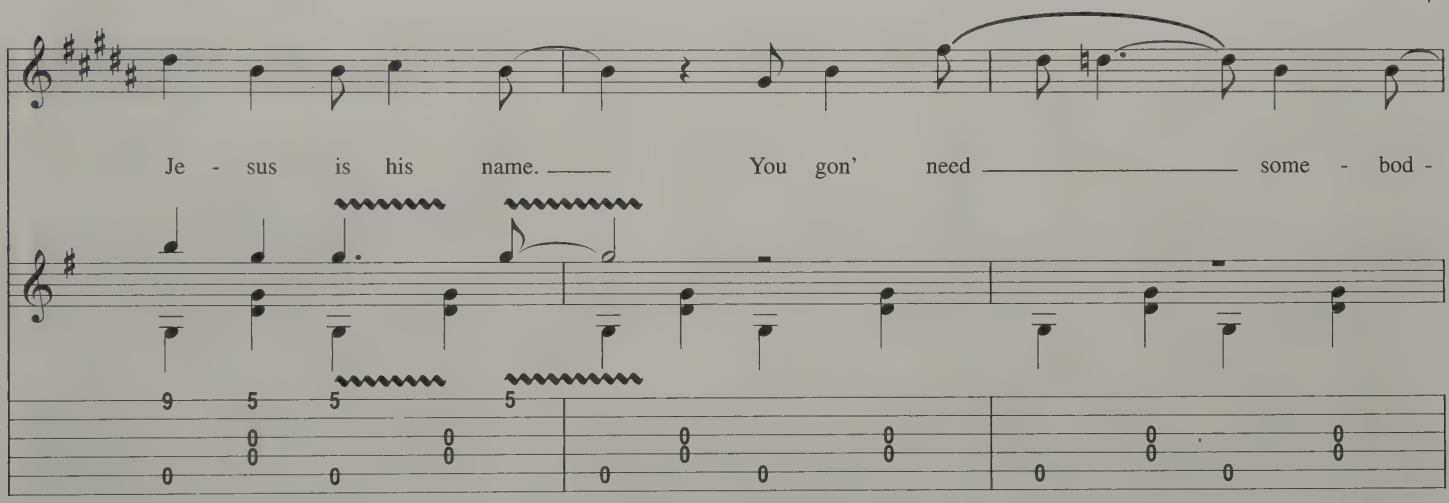
**3rd time music tacet; spoken vocal only.



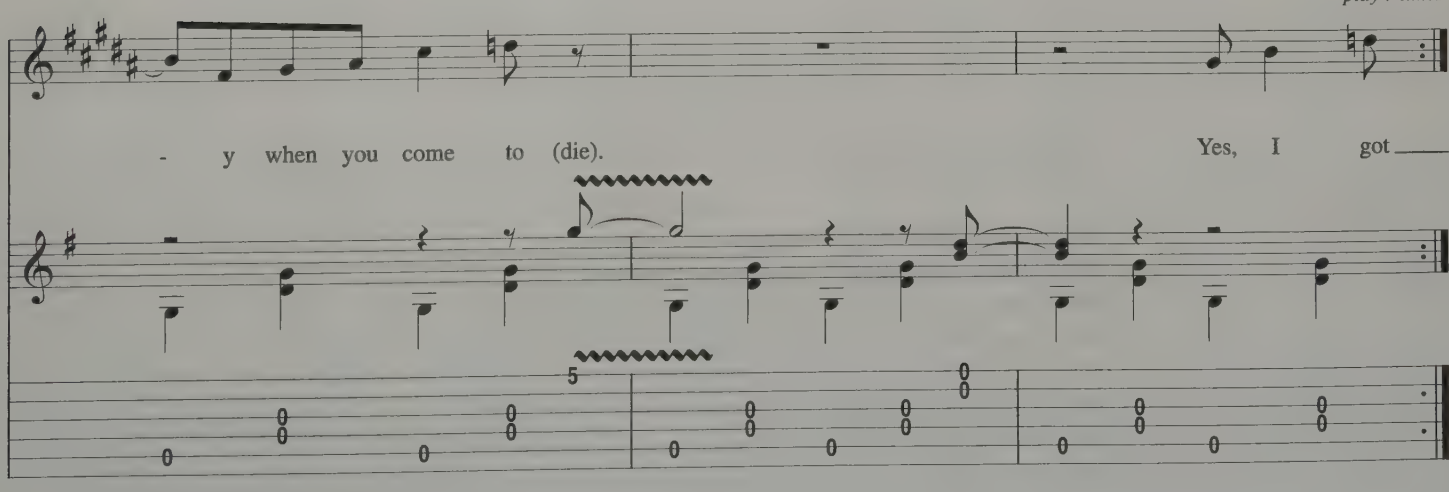


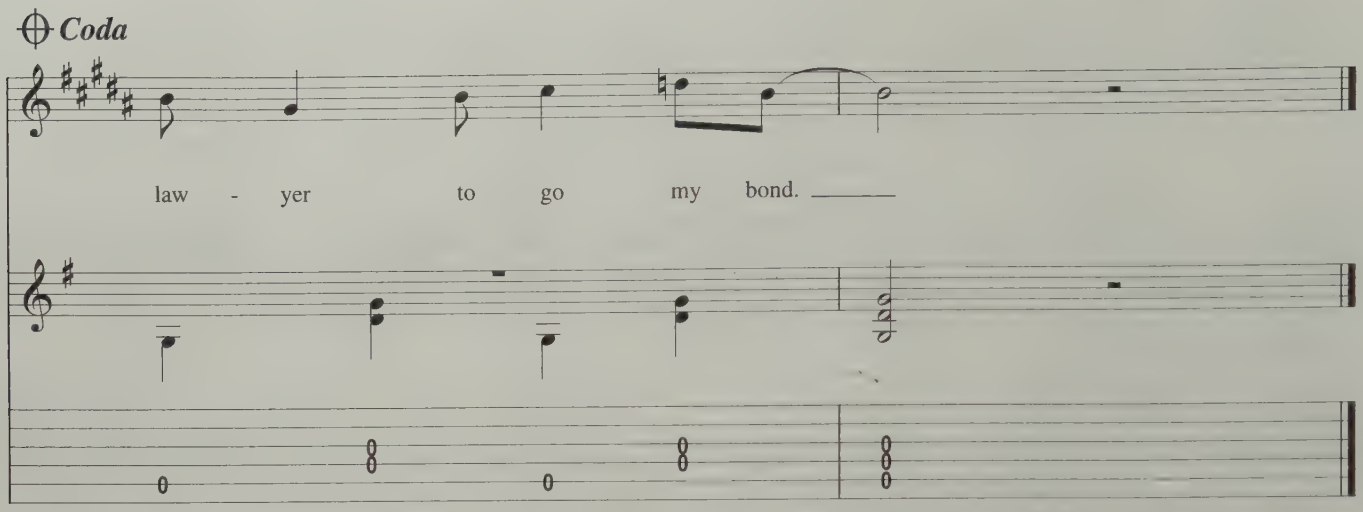


7th time to Coda



play 7 times





Additional Lyrics

2. Yes, I got a lawyer to go my bond.
   Well, I've got a lawyer to go my …
   Well, I'll point you out a man, King Jesus is His name.
   Well, I got a lawyer to go my …

3. Well friends, I want to tell you, they tell me when He come down His hair gonna be like lamb wool, and His eyes like flames of fire, and every man gonna know He's the son of the true living God. 'Round His shoulders gonna be a rainbow, and His feet like fine brass. And, my friends, I wanted you to know again He said that He going to have a river water that's flowing through the garden, 'clared the preacher. And He's gonna have a tree before the twelve manners of food, and the leaves gonna be healing damnation, and the big rock that you can set behind, the wind can't blow at you no more, and you gonna count the four and twenty elders that you can sit down and talk with and that you can talk about your trouble that you come, world that you just come from. He going to sing this song:

4. I got a lawyer to go my bond.
   I got a lawyer to go my…
   I will point you out a man, King Jesus is His …
   I got a lawyer to go my…

5. Don't you need somebody when you come to die?
   Don't you need somebody when you come to …
   I will point you out a man, King Jesus is His name.
   Well, I've got a lawyer to…

6. Yes, you need somebody when you come to die.
   Don't you need somebody when you come to…
   Well, I'll point you out a man, King Jesus is His name.
   Well, I got a lawyer…

7. Well, I've got somebody to go my bond.
   Well, I've got somebody to go my…
   Well, I'll point you out a man, King Jesus is His name.
   Well, I've got a lawyer to go my bond.

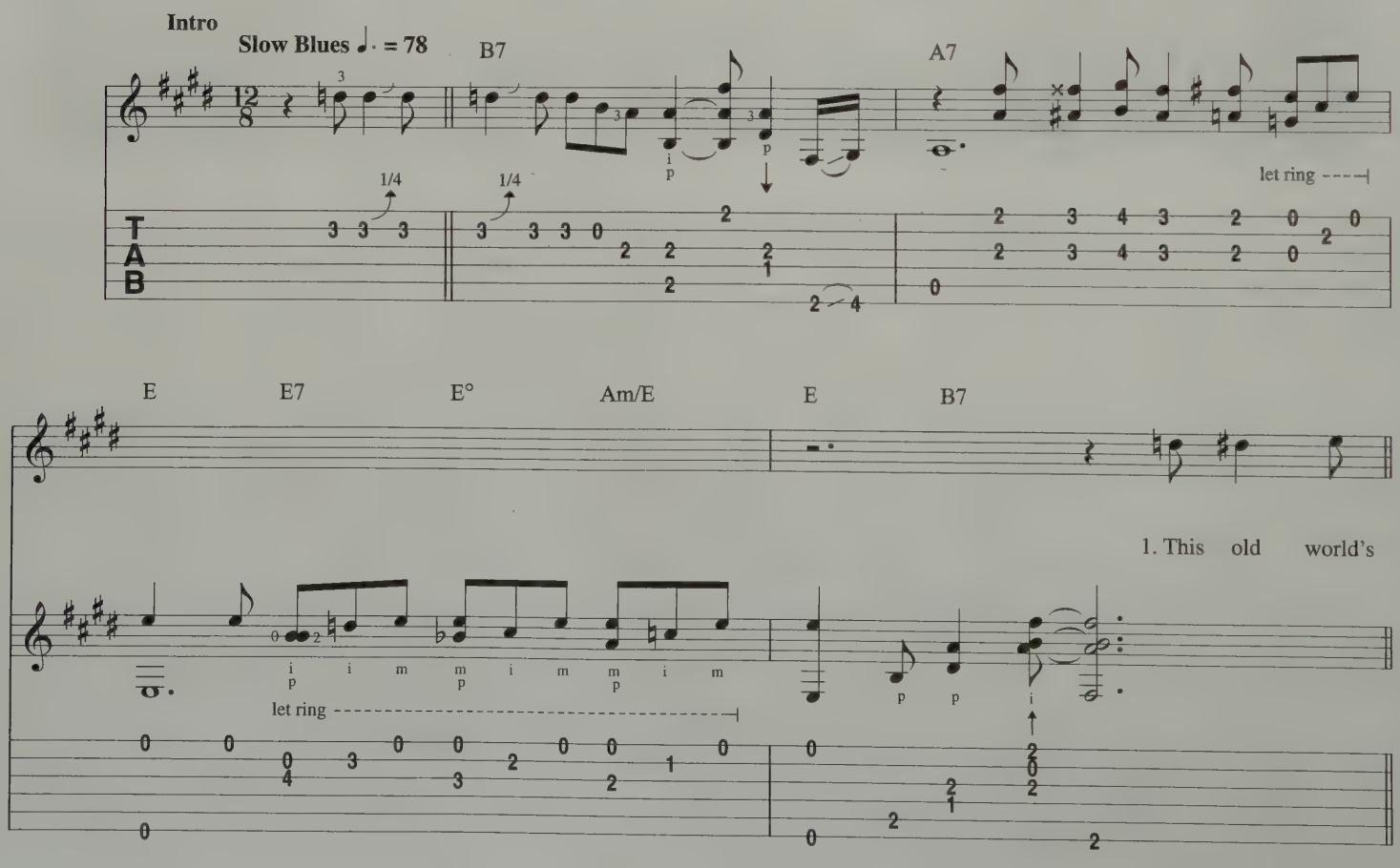
Calvin Frazier: Though shown here in the fifties with a vintage Strat, Frazier made a series of pre-war acoustic recordings that sound remarkably like Robert Johnson.

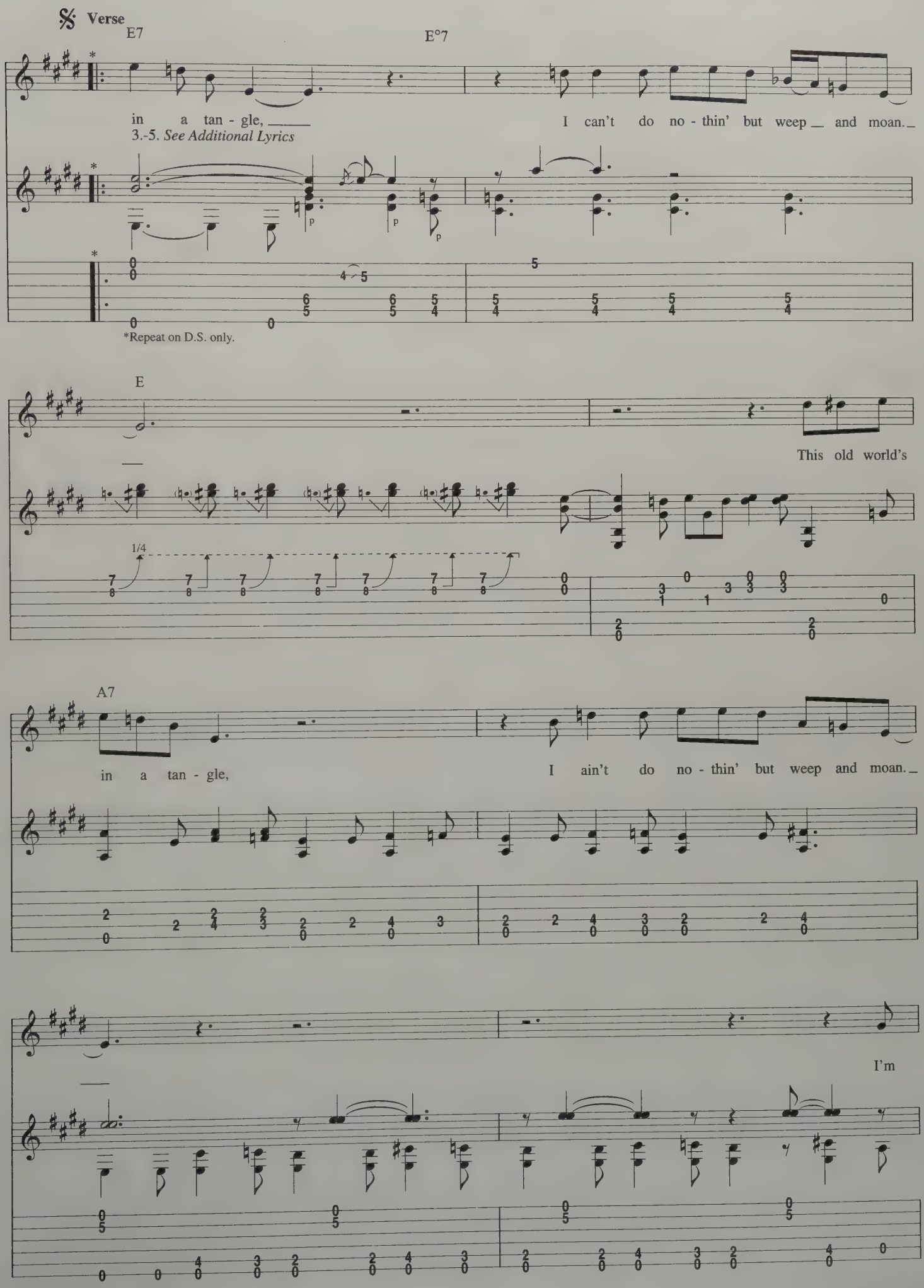
THIS OLD WORLD'S IN A TANGLE

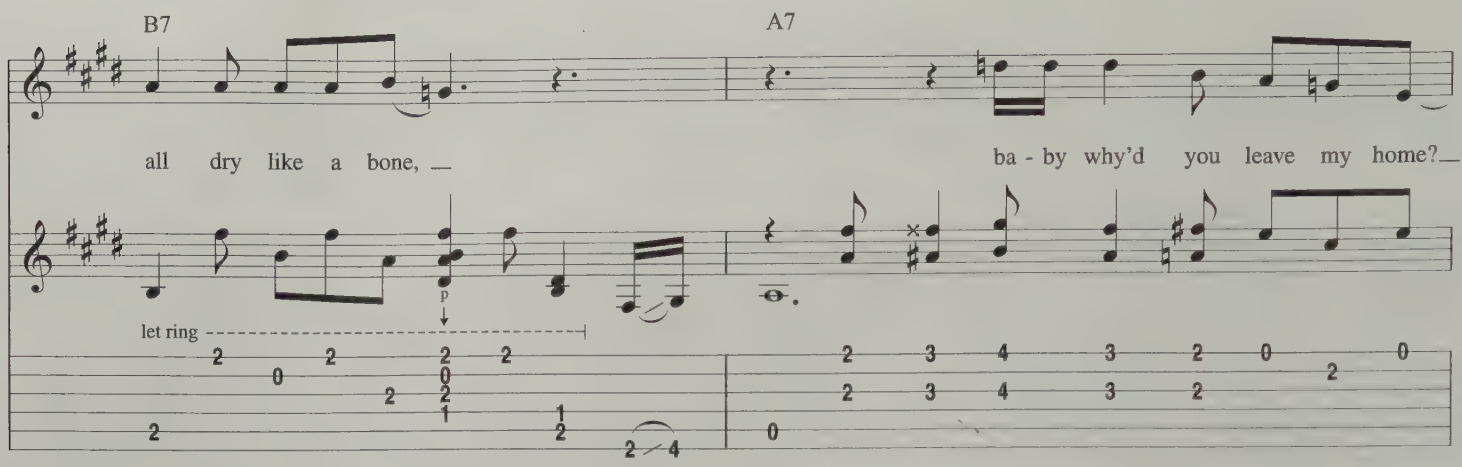
Calvin Frazier (1915–1972)

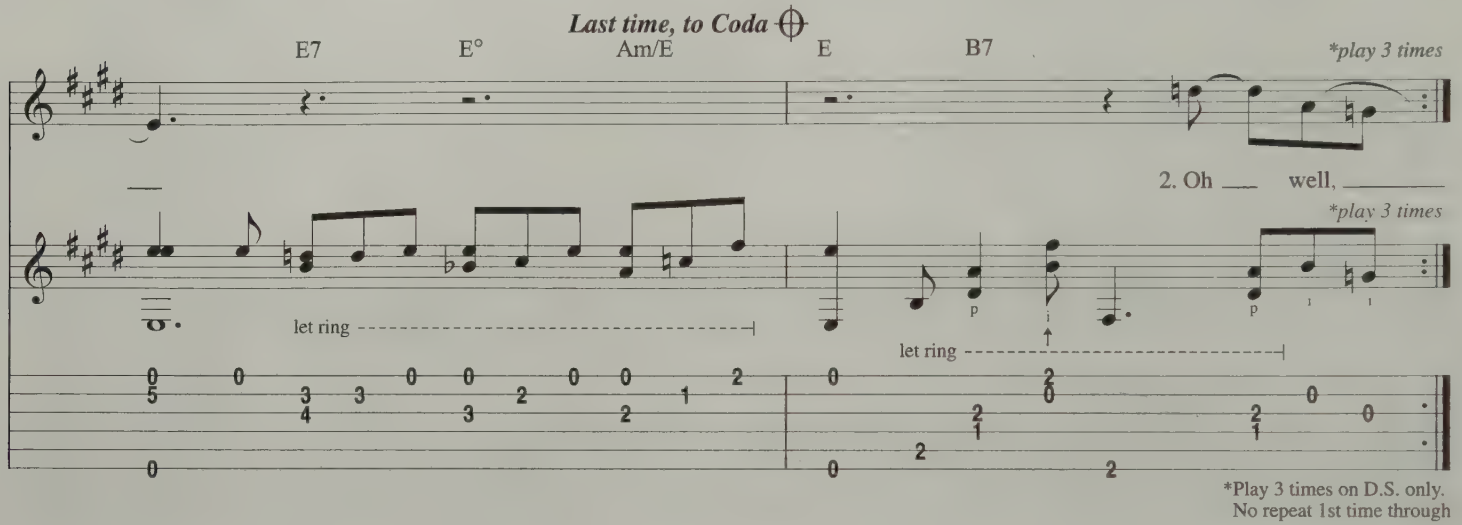
After Ike Zinnerman, who was one of Robert Johnson's principal mentors, Calvin Frazier is the most enigmatic character in the Johnson universe. A jump blues electric guitarist in Detroit in the forties and fifties with a modest recording career, he cut one historic acoustic session for Alan Lomax in October 1938. With second guitarist and vocalist Sampson Pittman joining him on 14 of 15 tracks, they produced a series of competent, prewar Delta blues guitar duets. On the fifteenth number, however, Frazier performed solo. The result, "This Old World's in a Tangle," is startling to behold: he sounds remarkably like Robert Johnson in his vocal and guitar playing. In fact, Frazier (who was a cousin to Johnny Shines) knew and played with Johnson and had been invited to join him at the San Antonio sessions in 1936 as a second guitarist! As Frazier had recently murdered a man and was in the process of evading the law, he was unable to attend the recording session that would have changed the course of musical history even more than it did.

"This Old World's in a Tangle" appears to be based on Johnson's "Kind Hearted Woman Blues." Measures 1 and 2 (E7 and E°7) are the most obvious examples. Measure 3 (E), interestingly, uses a lick that Johnson played in "Sweet Home Chicago" over the IV chord. Of course, B/G (with the G bent up a bluesy quarter step) works well with the I chord. Other sections of the piece contain licks not found in Johnson's music. For instance, the intro has Frazier bending and extricating licks from the open root position of the E blues scale over the V (B7) chord and playing an ascending pattern with 6ths over the IV (A7) chord. In addition, measures 5 and 6 (IV) of the solo contain a pattern at the fifth position that would become a common device in Jimmy Rogers's electric guitar work with Muddy Waters in the fifties.

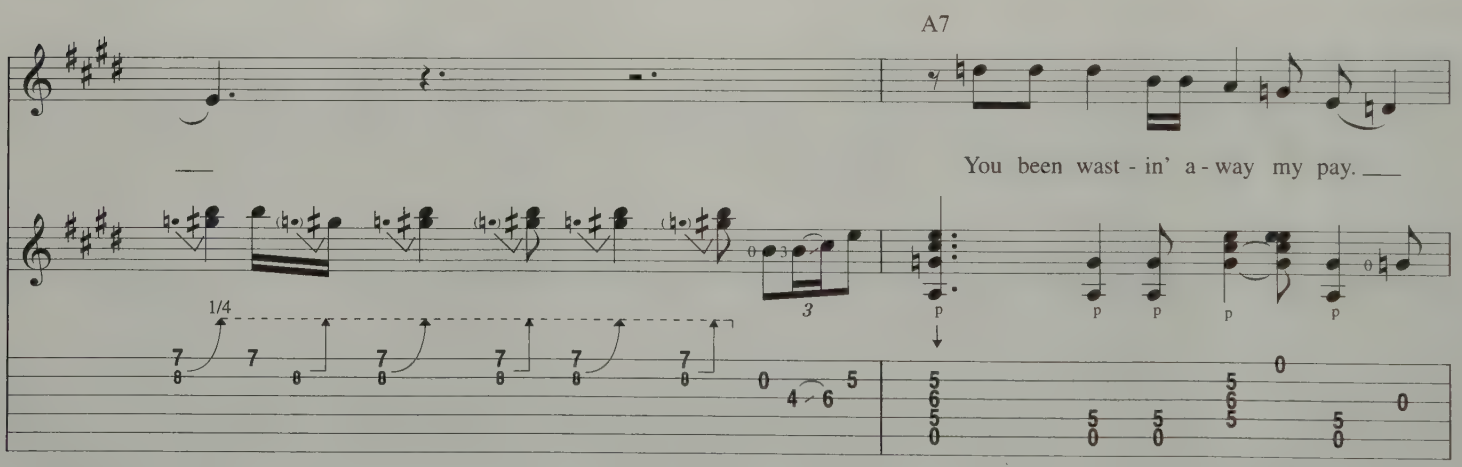


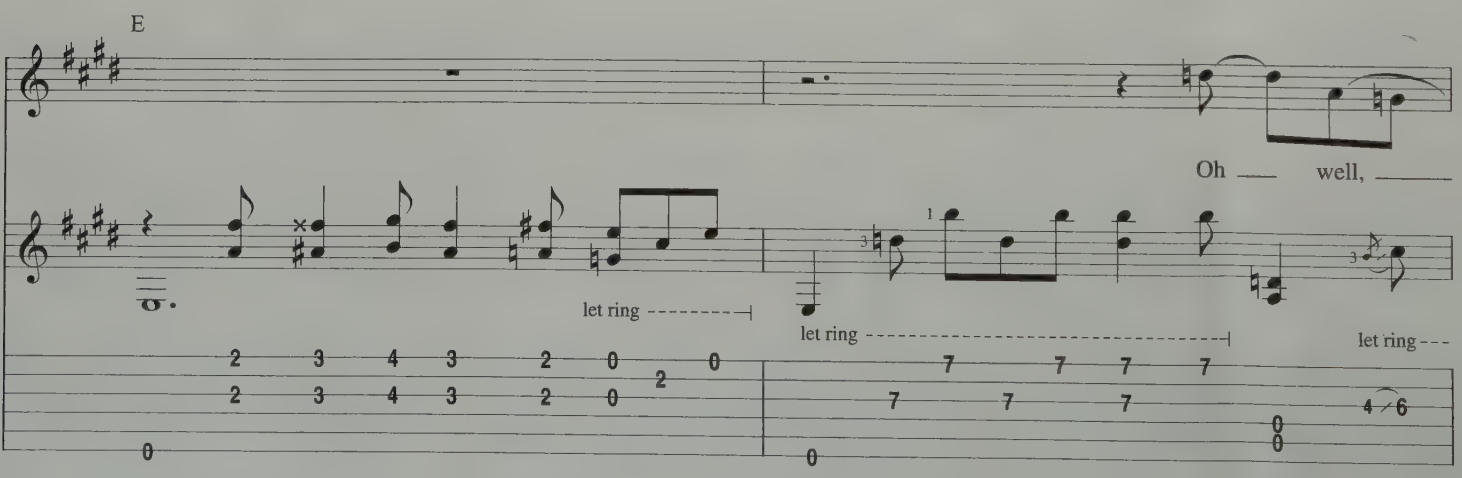

𝄋 Verse
E7
E°7
in a tan - gle,
3.-5. See Additional Lyrics
I can't do no - thin' but weep and moan.
*Repeat on D.S. only.
E
This old world's
1/4
A7
in a tan - gle,
I ain't do no - thin' but weep and moan.
I'm

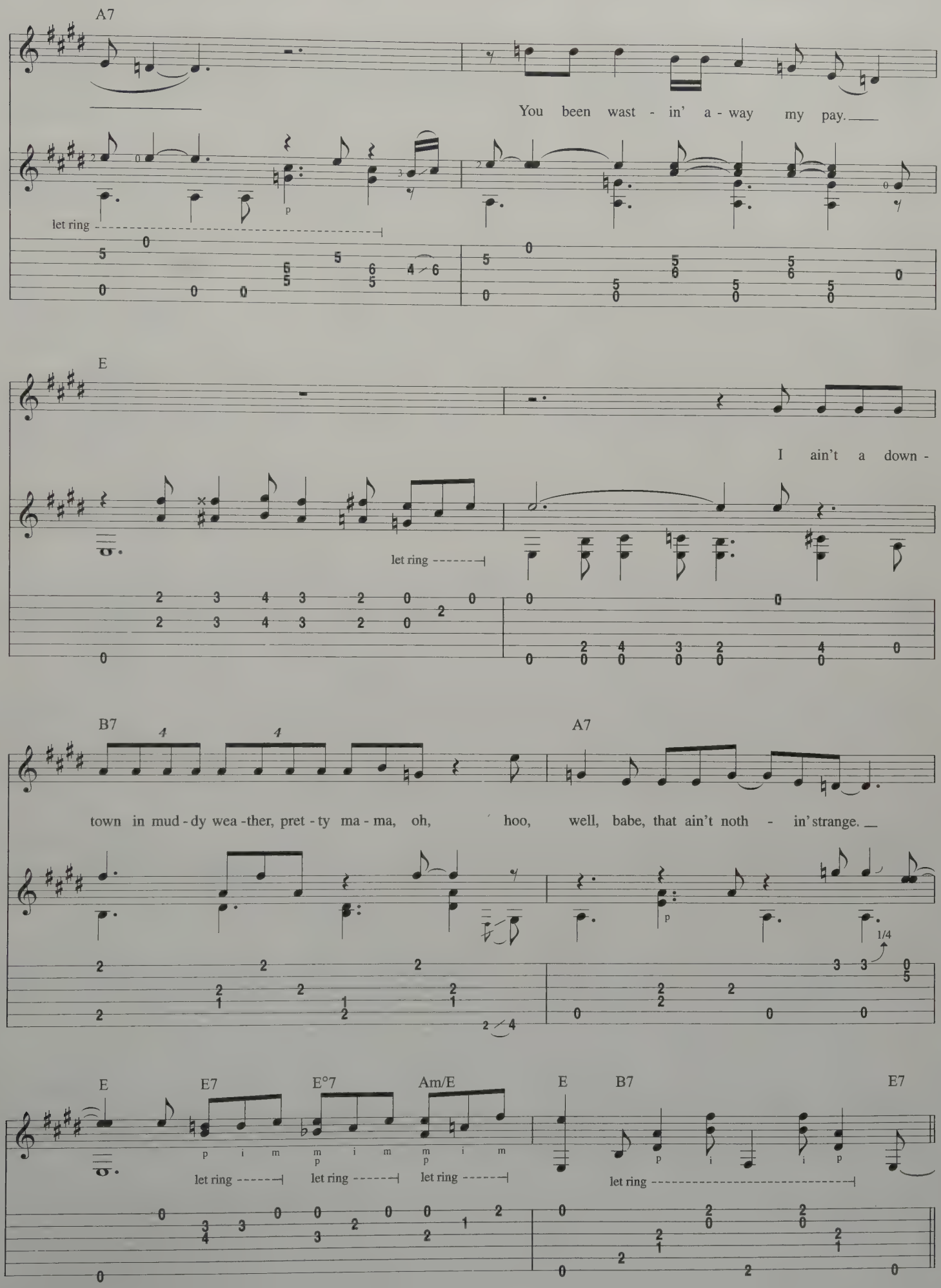


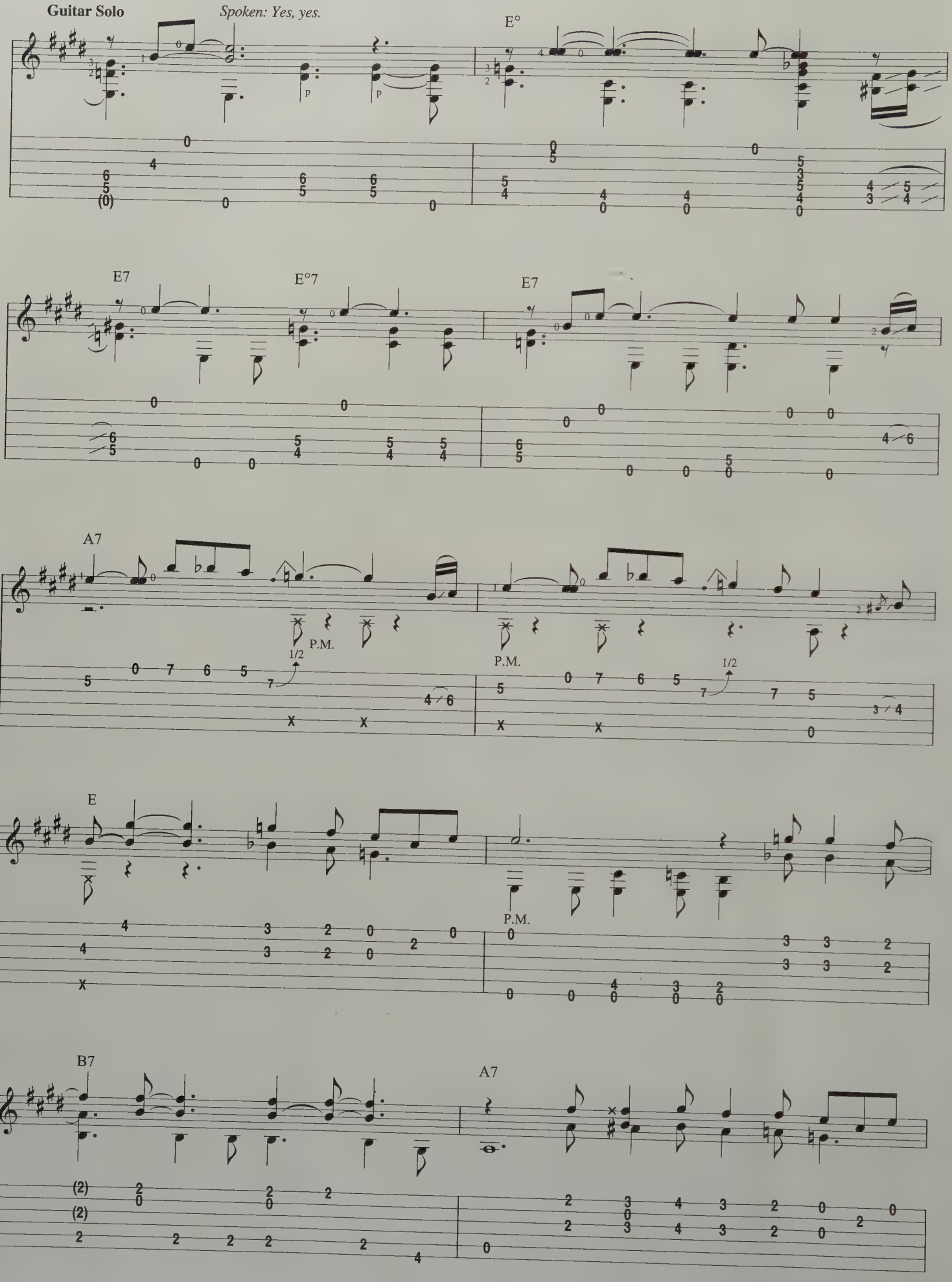


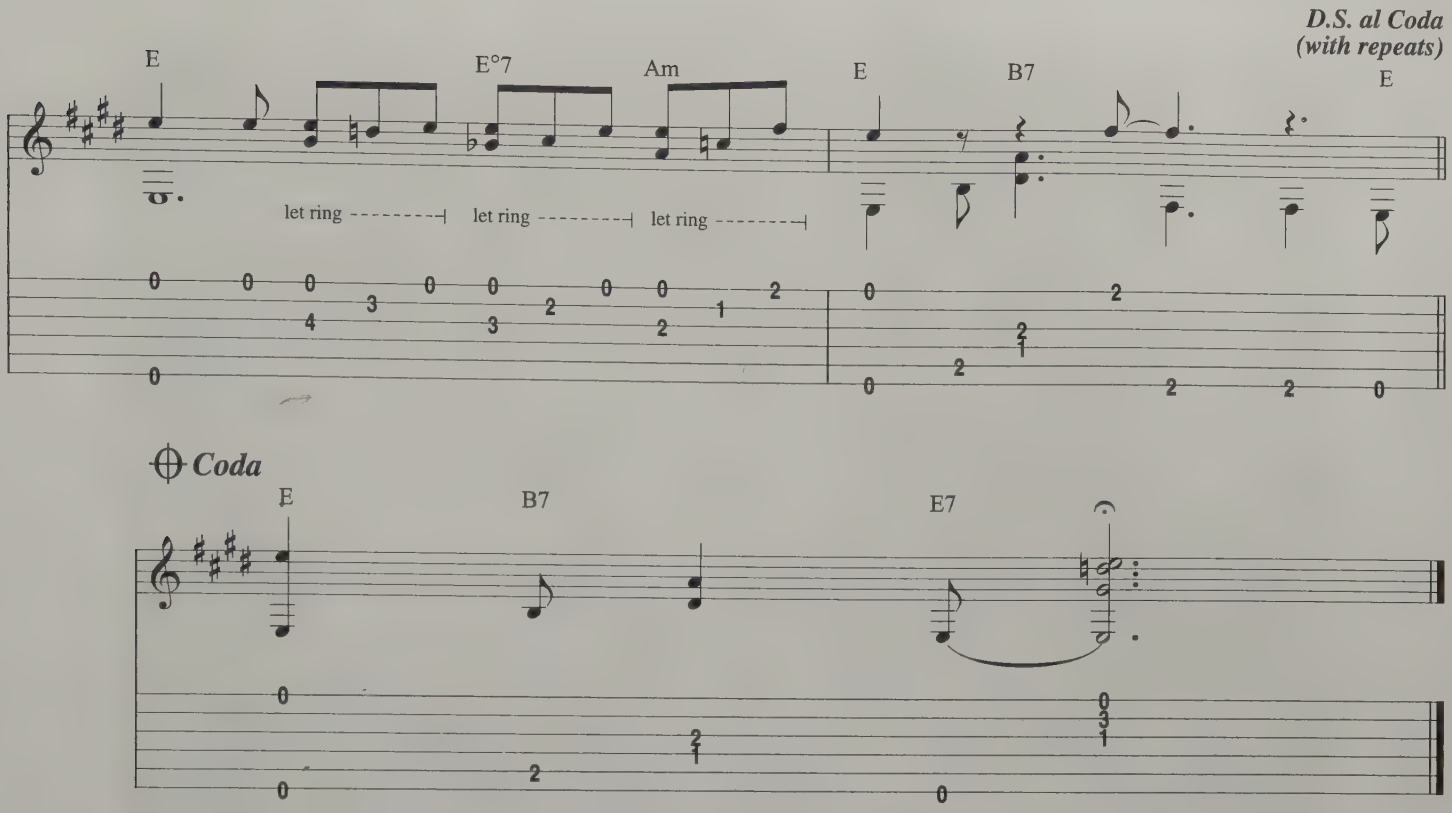
*Play 3 times on D.S. only.
No repeat 1st time through






A7
You been wast - in' a - way my pay.
let ring
E
I ain't a down -
let ring
B7
A7
town in mud - dy wea - ther, pret - ty ma - ma, oh, hoo, well, babe, that ain't noth - in' strange.
1/4
E
E7
E°7
Am/E
E
B7
E7
let ring
let ring
let ring
let ring


Guitar Solo
Spoken: Yes, yes.
E°
E7
E°7
E7
A7
P.M.
1/2
P.M.
1/2
E
P.M.
B7
A7



Additional Lyrics

3. This old world's in a bad condition,
   I see it worried night and day.
   This old world's in a bad condition,
   I see it worried night and day.
   Ain't gonna find a lot of people working on the WPA.

4. Now the WPA people make me think they're devils.
   They all do nothin' but sleep and lay on the shovel.
   Now the WPA people
   Make me think they're all devils.
   They do nothin' but sleep in the day.

5. Ooh hoo, baby they all devils.
   Oh well, they gonna make everything alright.
   Oh well, they gonna make everything alright.
   If I doin' nice pay day,
   Ooh, baby, well I'm gonna get my change right.

Robert Johnson: The greatest blues guitarist, he took his inspiration from the best of his contemporaries and made lasting art.

CROSS ROAD BLUES

Robert Johnson (1911–1938)

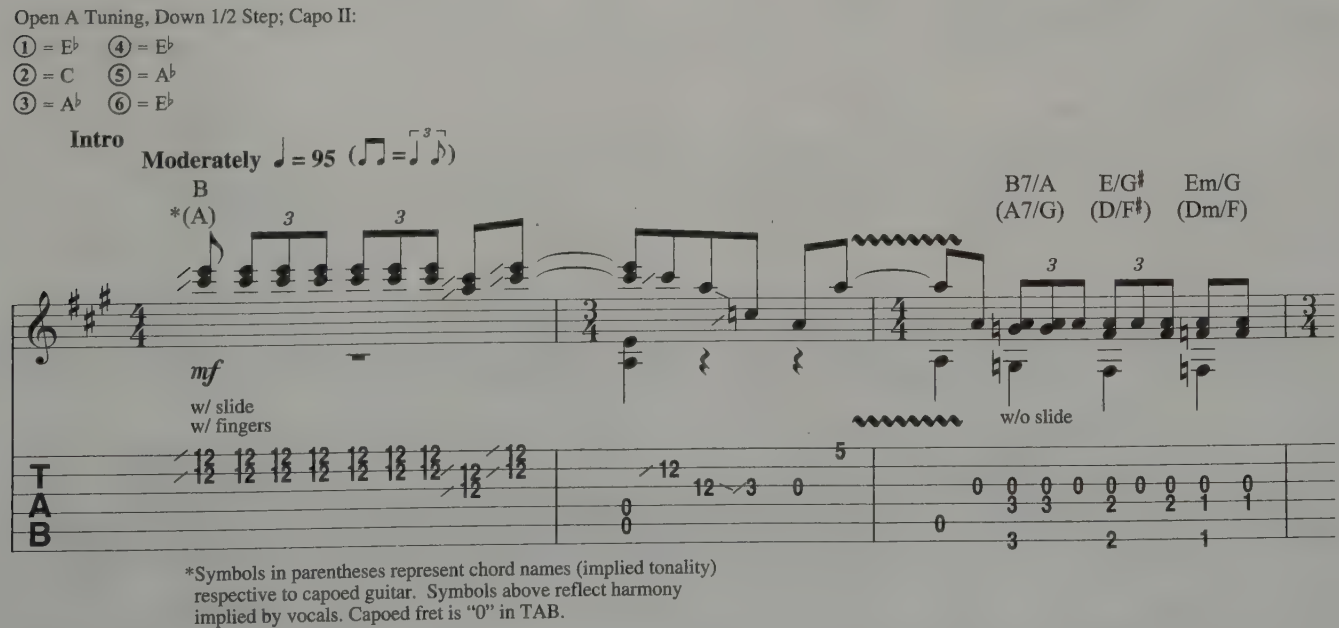
Along with "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom," "Cross Road Blues" sums up an aspect of the Delta blues tradition that Johnson drew from and added to. Based on the "harp" (harmonica) style material that he first developed in "Terraplane Blues," it shows his vertical harmonic sense via sharply plucked, syncopated chords and chordal forms.

Both Leroy Carr's "Straight Alky Blues" and Roosevelt Sykes's "Black River Blues" were precedents for "Cross Road Blues." Taking his cue from these two pianists, Johnson interpreted and expanded on their themes by applying his considerable harmonica ability to a guitar song played in open A tuning with slide and conventionally fretted passages. The result is one of the uncontested classics of Delta blues, overflowing with harmonic and melodic ideas for the postwar generation of electric guitarists to ponder.

Measures 7 and 8 (IV) of verse 1 display a portion of Johnson's creativity in open A tuning. Working around fret 5 where the IV (D) chord is centered, he goes beyond the triadic harmony (D–F♯–A) with C/A (♭7th and 5th) at fret 8 for a dominant tonality. In addition, he lays in a subtle nuance with the quarter-step bend of the ♭7th (C) up to the blue note.

In measures 9 and 10 (I) of verse 1, Johnson demonstrates his consummate skill in moving effortlessly between slide parts and fretted licks. First he establishes the tonic tonality (A) at fret 12 with the bottleneck and open strings, followed by the open strings with the root (A) added on string 1 at fret 5 and the ♭7th (G) at fret 3. The coupe de grace, however, is the C (B♯) bent a quarter step at fret 3 on string 4. Buried in an "inner voice" that goes by quickly, it is easy to miss, but the effect of opening up the harmony is felt, nonetheless.

Johnson teases us with a sophisticated passing chord in measure 4 of verse 3. After indicating the A (I) and A7 (I7) chords with the tonic (A) and ♭7th (G) notes played on top of the A triad, he sneaks in the F♯ note at fret 2, implying a VI chord. He plays this in measure 9 of verse 2 as well, and in measure 9 of verse 3 he adds an F note on the top string to suggest an A chord with a ♯5!



*Symbols in parentheses represent chord names (implied tonality) respective to capoed guitar. Symbols above reflect harmony implied by vocals. Capoed fret is "0" in TAB.

Words and Music by ROBERT JOHNSON
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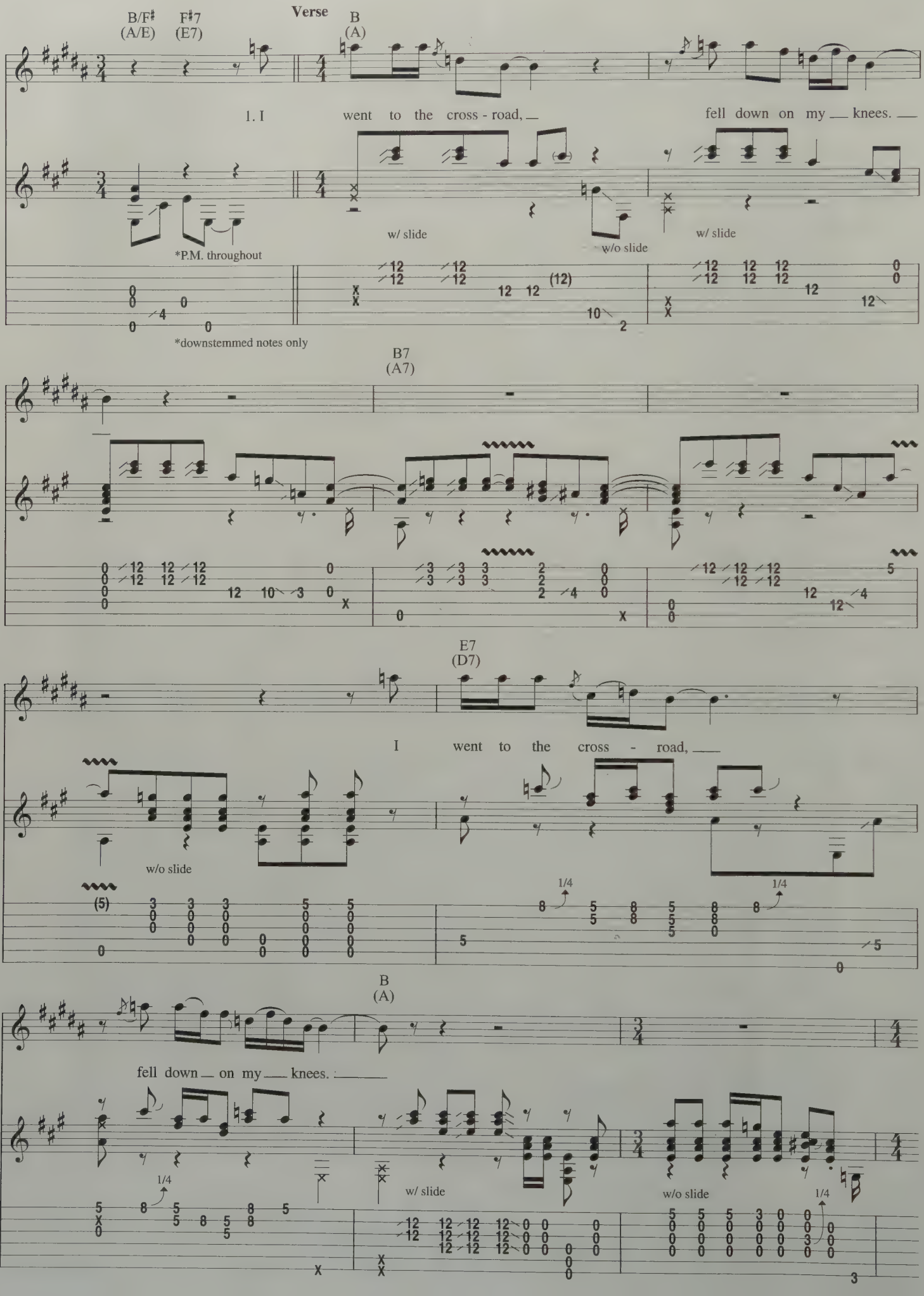
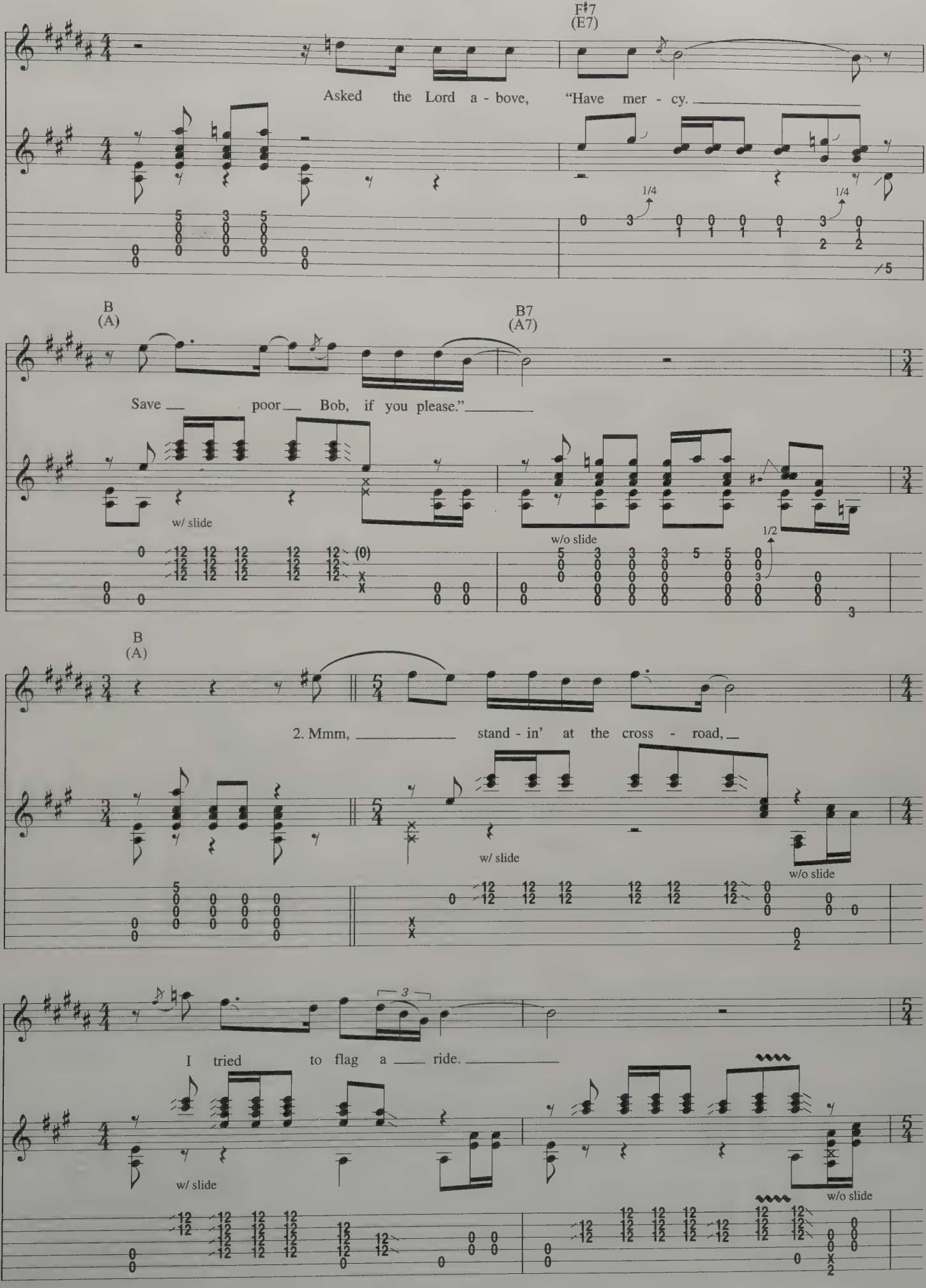
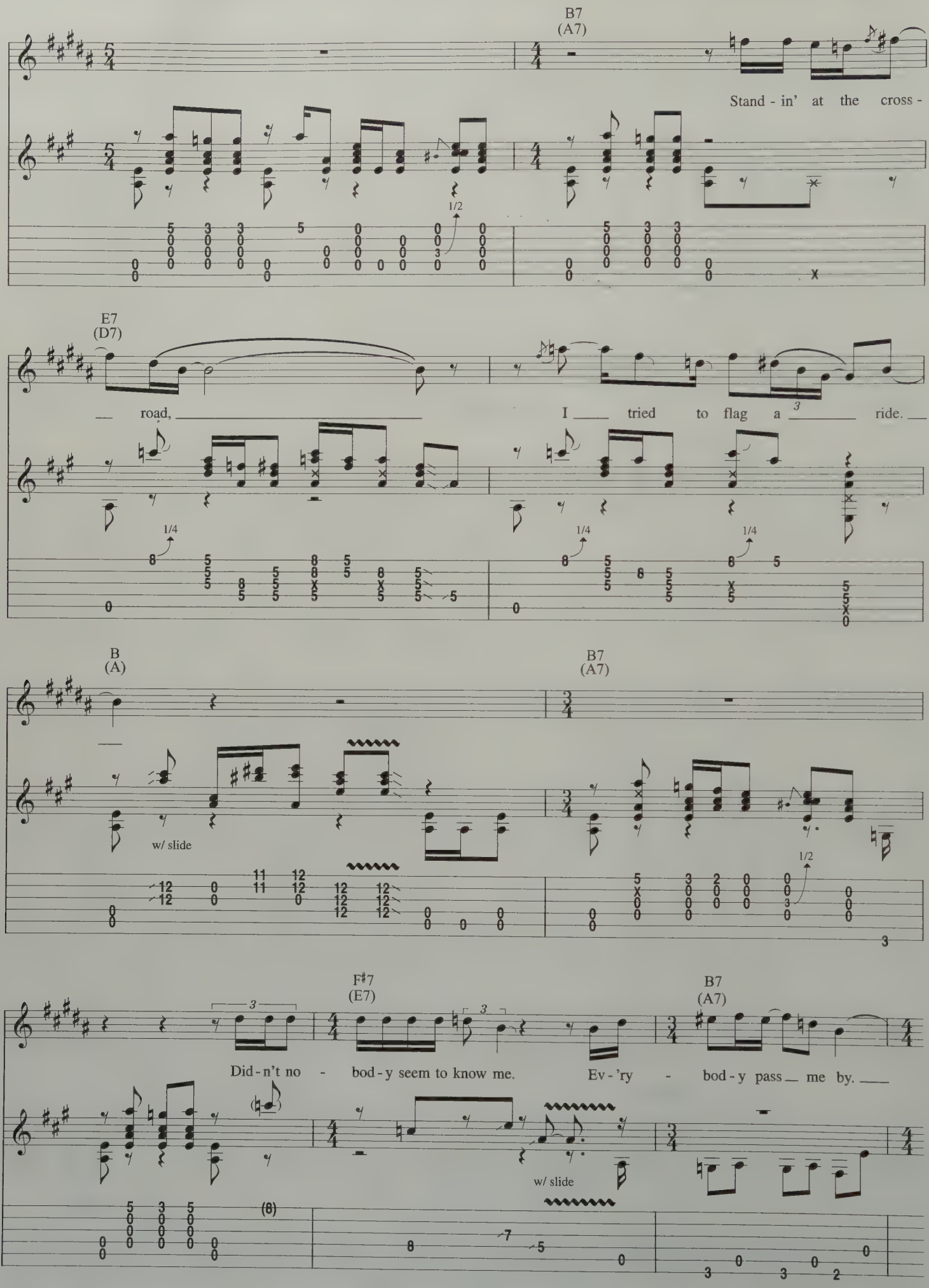
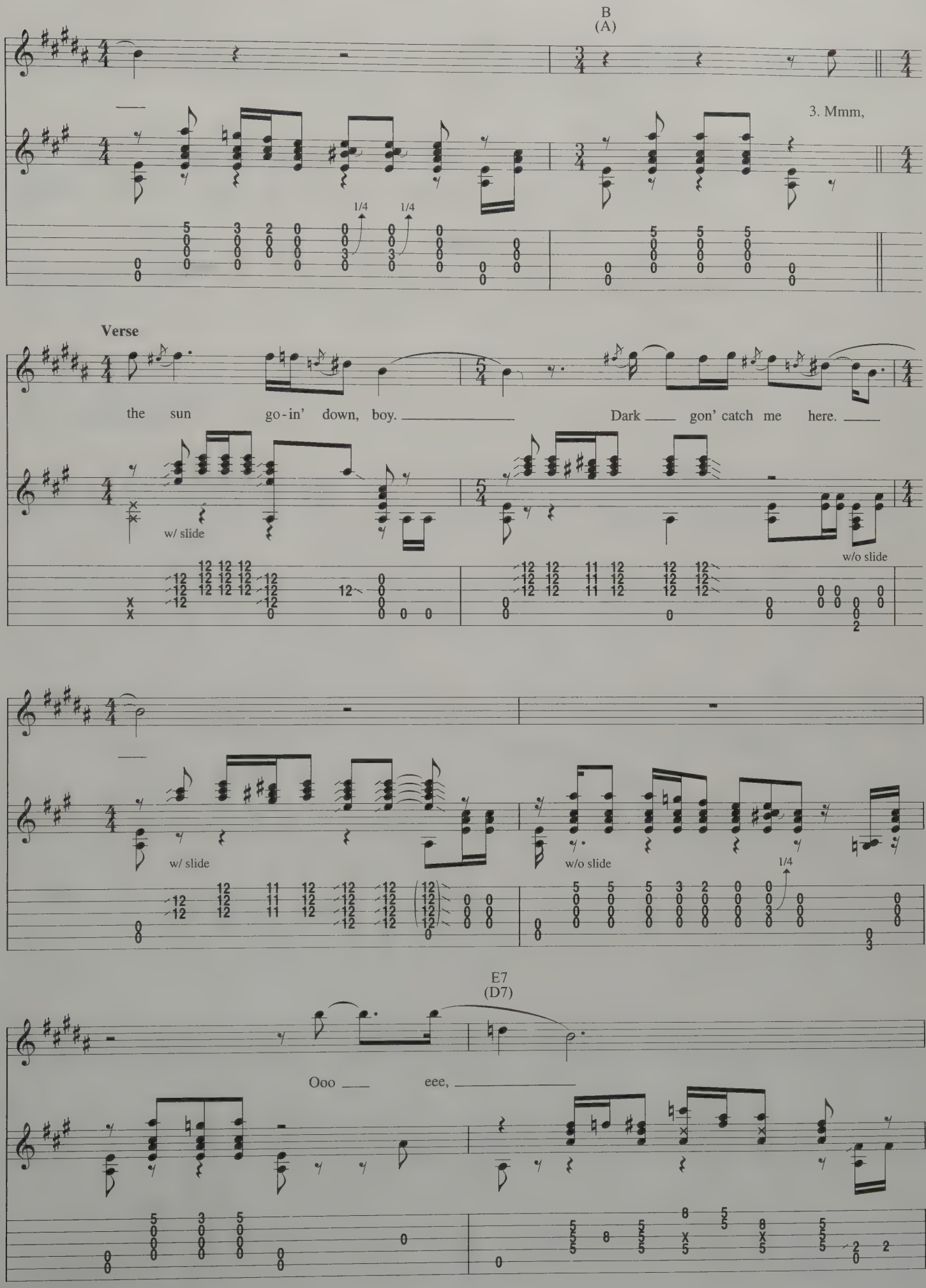
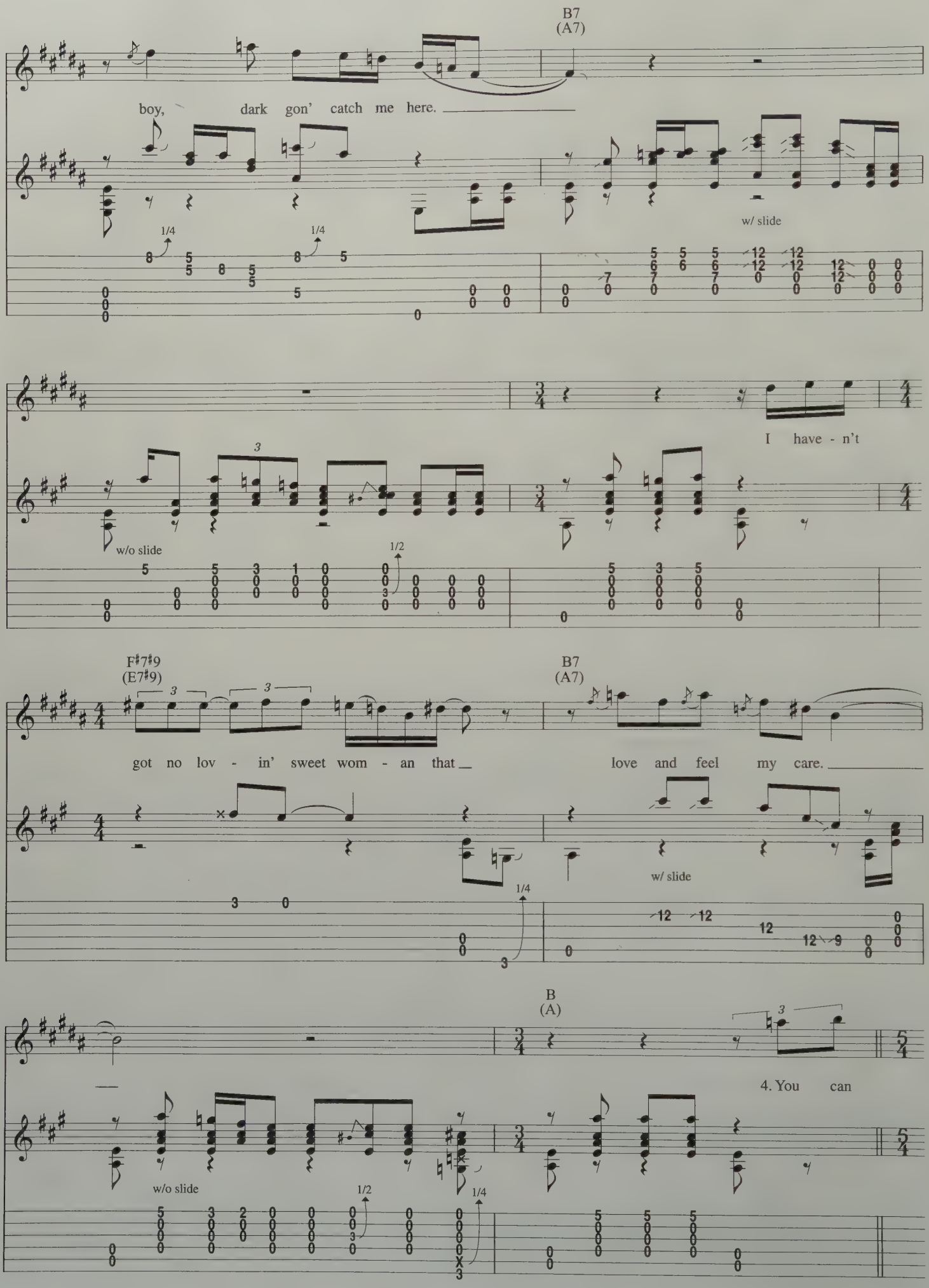
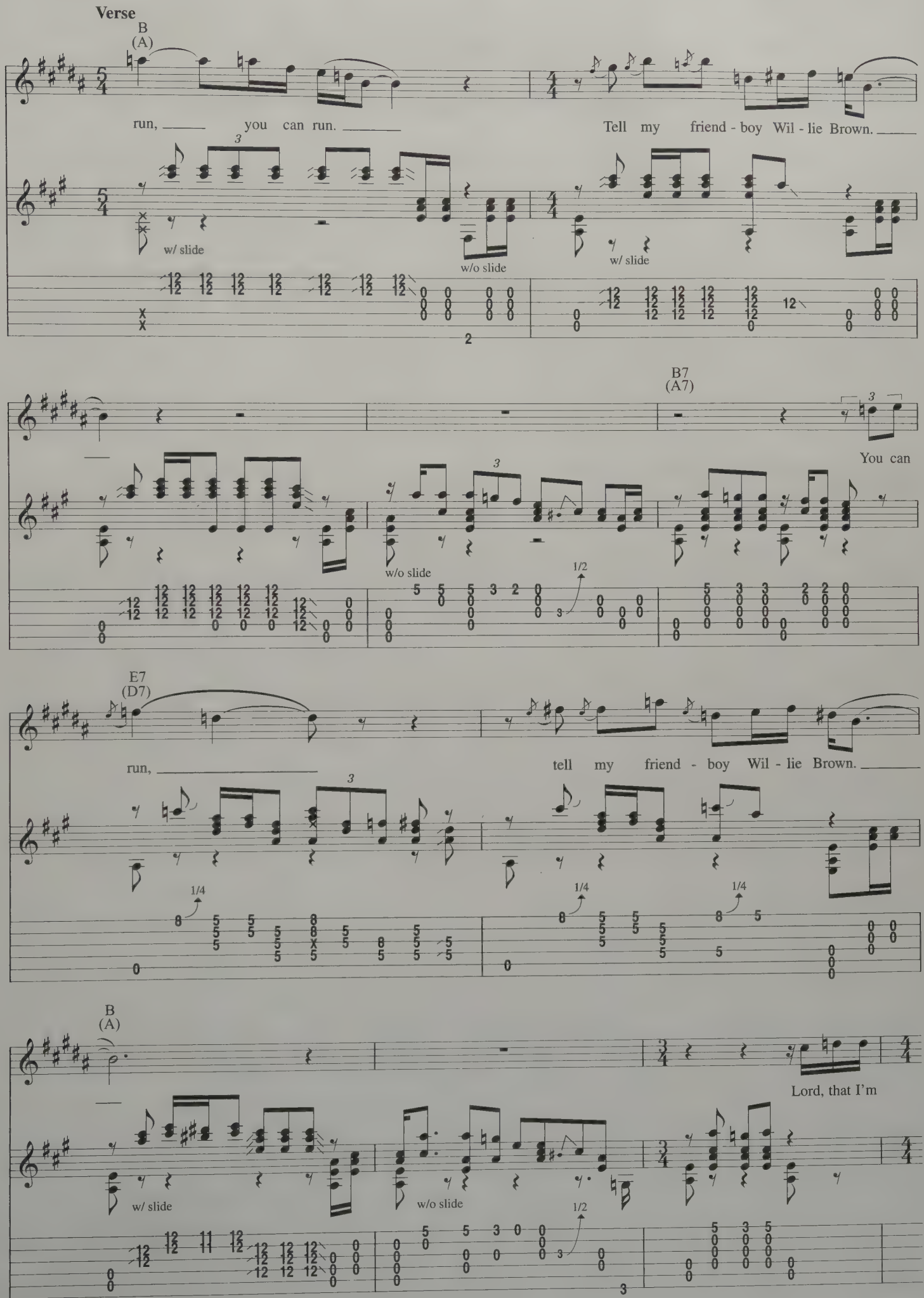

B/F♯ (A/E)
F♯7 (E7)
Verse
B (A)
1. I went to the cross - road, fell down on my knees.
*P.M. throughout
w/ slide
w/o slide
w/ slide
*downstemmed notes only
B7 (A7)
E7 (D7)
I went to the cross - road,
w/o slide
1/4
1/4
B (A)
fell down on my knees.
1/4
w/ slide
w/o slide
1/4

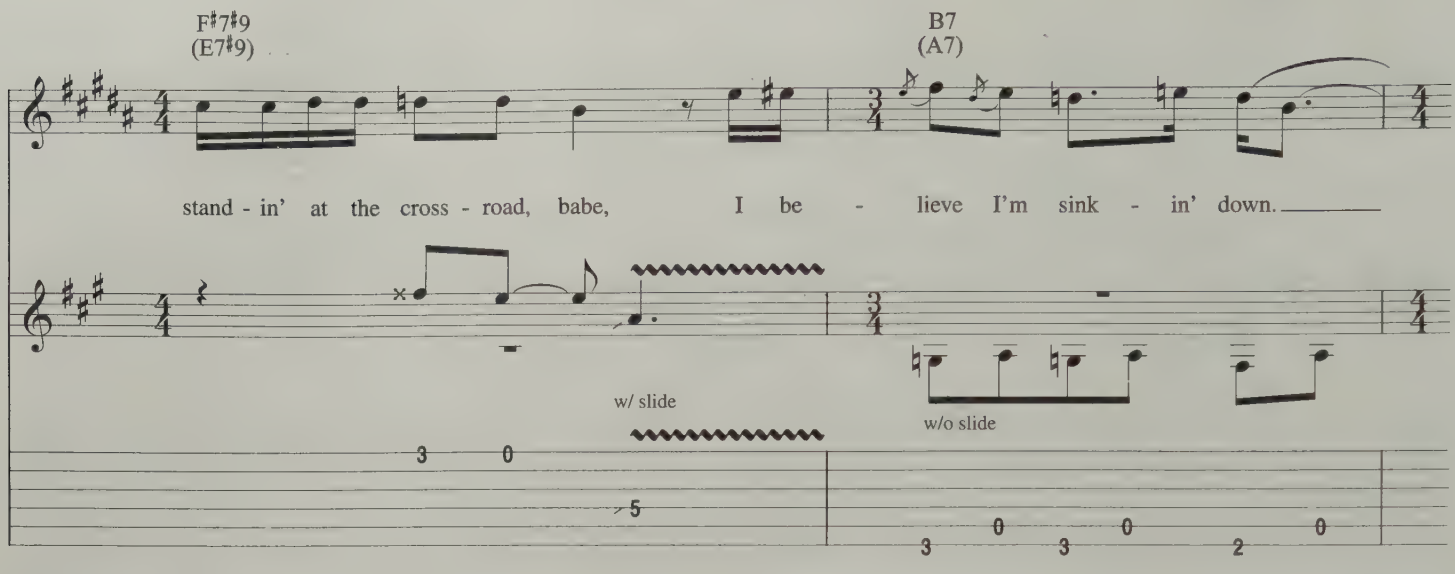

F♯7
(E7)
Asked the Lord a - bove, "Have mer - cy.
1/4
1/4
B
(A)
B7
(A7)
Save poor Bob, if you please."
w/ slide
w/o slide
1/2
B
(A)
2. Mmm, stand - in' at the cross - road,
w/ slide
w/o slide
3
I tried to flag a ride.
w/ slide
w/o slide

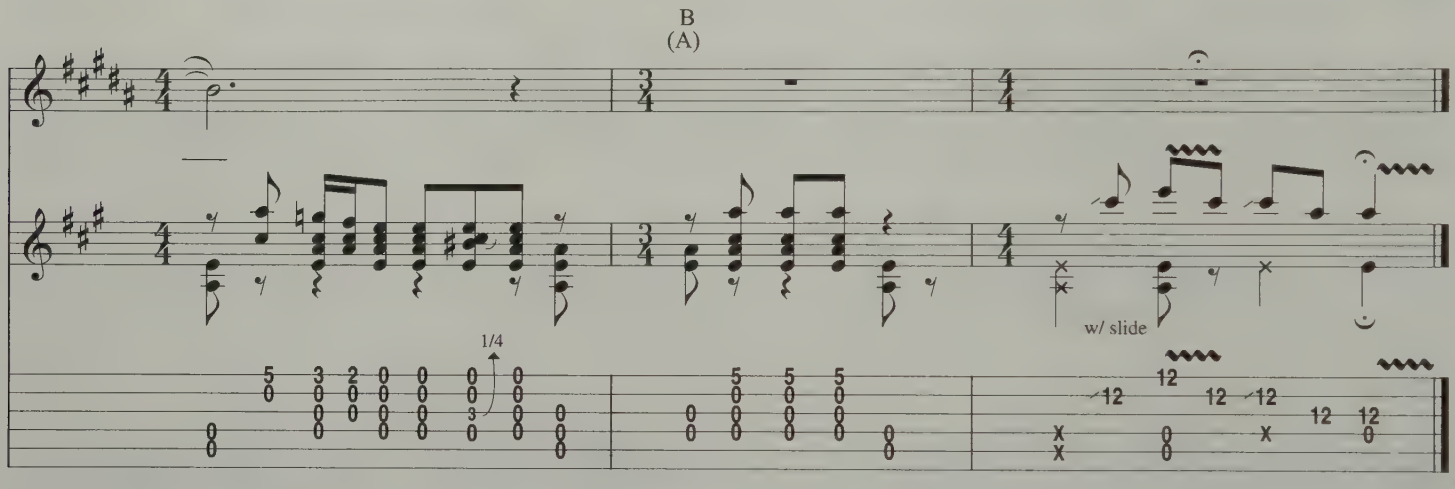

B7
(A7)
Stand - in' at the cross -
1/2
E7
(D7)
— road, —
I — tried to flag a 3 — ride. —
1/4
1/4
1/4
B
(A)
w/ slide
B7
(A7)
1/2
3
F♯7
(E7)
B7
(A7)
Did - n't no - bod - y seem to know me.
Ev - 'ry - bod - y pass — me by. —
w/ slide
(8)


B
(A)
3. Mmm,
1/4
1/4
Verse
the sun go-in' down, boy.
Dark gon' catch me here.
w/ slide
w/o slide
w/ slide
w/o slide
1/4
E7
(D7)
Ooo eee,


B7
(A7)
boy, dark gon' catch me here.
1/4
1/4
w/ slide
I have - n't
w/o slide
1/2
F♯7♯9
(E7♯9)
B7
(A7)
got no lov - in' sweet wom - an that
love and feel my care.
1/4
w/ slide
B
(A)
4. You can
w/o slide
1/2
1/4


Verse
B
(A)
run, you can run.
Tell my friend - boy Wil - lie Brown.
w/ slide
w/o slide
w/ slide
B7
(A7)
You can
w/o slide
1/2
E7
(D7)
run,
tell my friend - boy Wil - lie Brown.
1/4
1/4
1/4
B
(A)
Lord, that I'm
w/ slide
w/o slide
1/2


F♯7♯9
(E7♯9)
B7
(A7)
stand - in' at the cross - road, babe, I be - lieve I'm sink - in' down.
w/ slide
w/o slide


B
(A)
1/4
w/ slide

I BELIEVE I'LL DUST MY BROOM

Robert Johnson (1911–1938)

Building upon the piano tradition in the Delta and St. Louis, Robert Johnson created one of the most enduring and influential songs in the history of the blues: "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom." The melodic theme had precedents in "I Believe I'll Make a Change" by Aaron and Milton Sparks and "Believe I'll Go Back Home" by Jack Kelly. By wedding the theme to a driving boogie pattern, Johnson helped popularize an accompaniment first recorded by Johnnie Temple (see "Lead Pencil Blues") while expanding greatly on the harmonic content. Where Temple played only the bass string pattern with Charlie McCoy adding melody and fills, Johnson arranged his song so he could simultaneously play the bass, chordal forms, and lead figures by himself. Though too revolutionary for its time, "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom" would prove itself so durable that Elmore James and Jimmy Reed—not to mention a good portion of fifties rock 'n' roll—would profoundly feel its attraction. In surveying the entire history of postwar blues, it can be seen as one of the most prominent stylistic indicators.

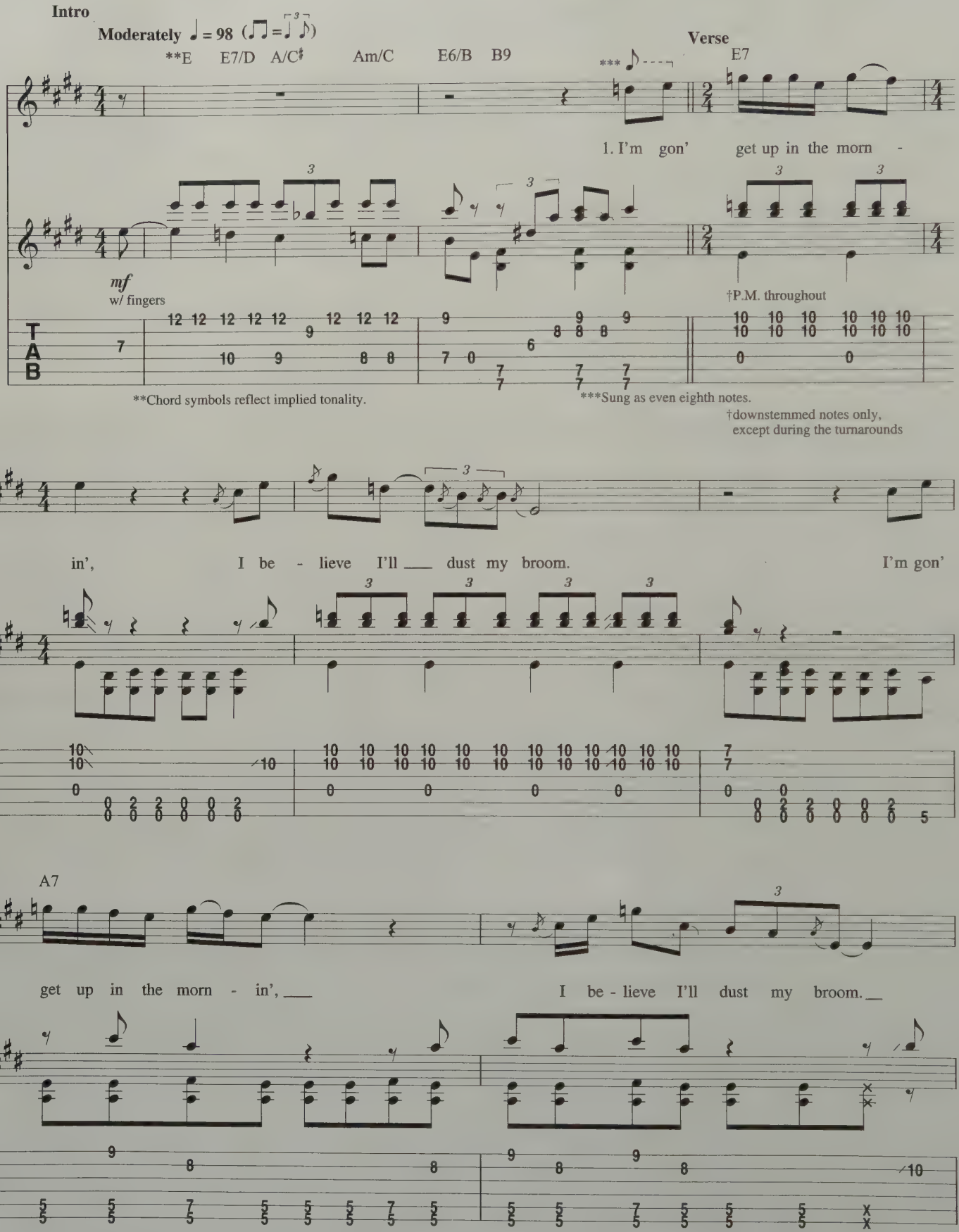
Amazingly, on this piece and its sister song, take 2 of "Phonograph Blues," Johnson debuted an open tuning seemingly unknown in the blues. Dubbed Aadd9 tuning, it is only one step away from his favorite open tuning, A. It makes possible the playing of boogie patterns on the bottom two strings along with easily accessible 3rds and 4ths on the top two strings. Also, due to the intervals between strings, blues-approved ♭5ths and ♭7ths are also within reach.

The two-measure intro/turnaround immediately shows the enhanced harmony available from the Aadd9 tuning. On beat 3 in measure 1, a bluesy ♭5th (B♭) from the blues scale is inserted in the cadence taking place on string 4. Another early payoff is in measure 2 and the resolution to the V (B) chord where a cool B9 arpeggio lays right across the strings around fret 7. In one form or another, Johnson parlays this hip voicing in measure 12 of each verse. Though this chord can be executed in open E tuning, the resulting voicing is no where near as smooth, harmonious, or as convenient to reach.

Measures 3–4 (I) of verse 4 have Johnson repeating the "hook" that he first introduced in the previous verses. Again he takes advantage of the Aadd9 tuning to incorporate some truly beautiful blues harmony into the proceedings. Along with the D/B (♭7th and 5th) notes, he adds E/B♭ (root and ♭5th) on beat 3. Be sure to notice how he also includes an F♯ on the third eighth note of measure 5—further proof of the "mystery tuning."

Measure 10 (IV) of verse 2 again demonstrates the advantage of the tuning and was one of the conclusive sections that affirmed this tuning's accuracy. While playing the cut boogie pattern (5ths and 6ths) on the two bottom strings, Johnson embellishes on the top two strings with a sweet C♯/A (root and 3rd) that would be extremely difficult to play in any other tuning. This is one of the instances where you must barre all six strings with your index finger, using your ring finger for the A and your pinky for the C♯ note.

*Aadd9 Tuning, Down 1/2 Step:
① = E♭ ④ = E♭
② = C ⑤ = B♭
③ = A♭ ⑥ = E♭

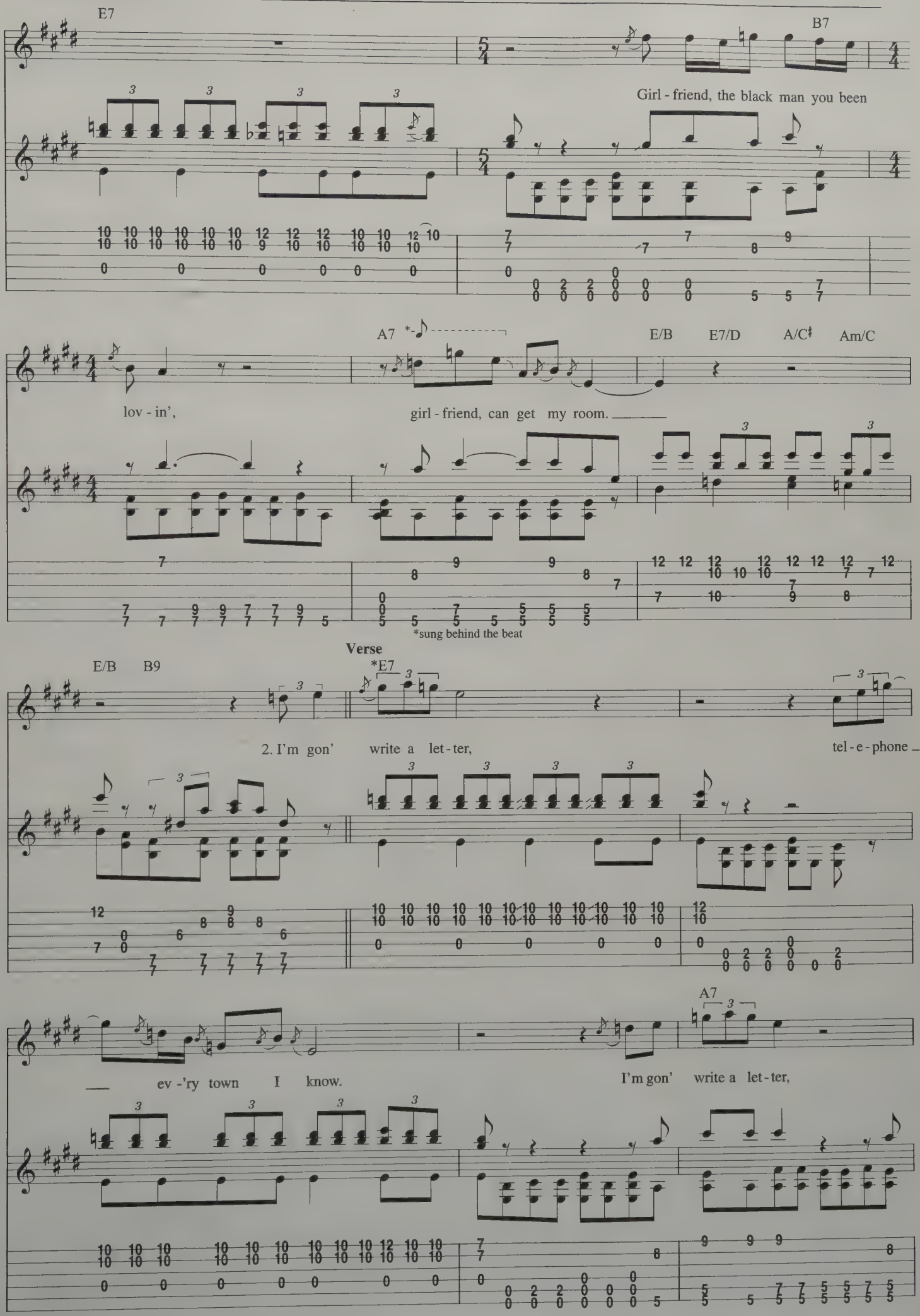


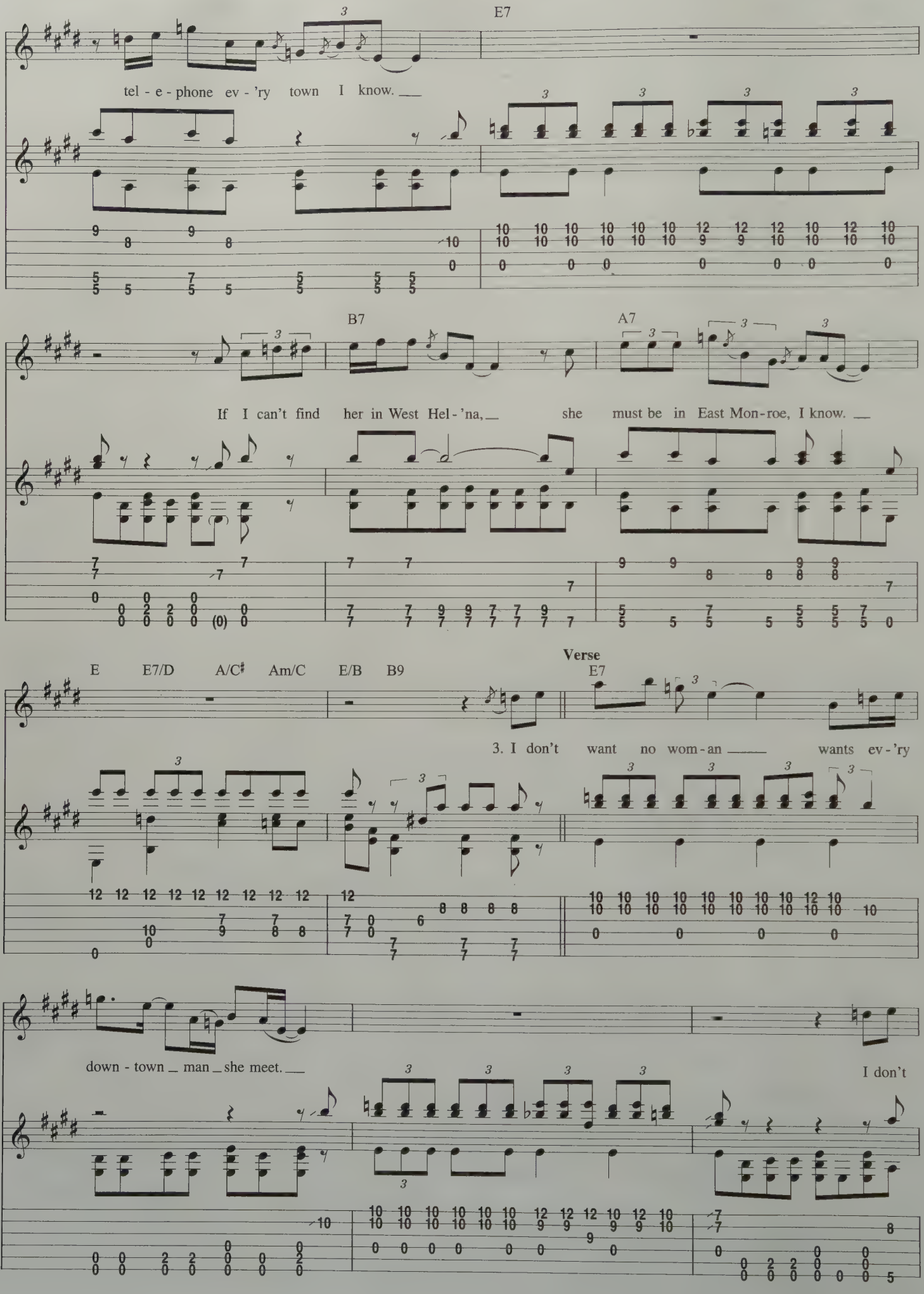
**Chord symbols reflect implied tonality.

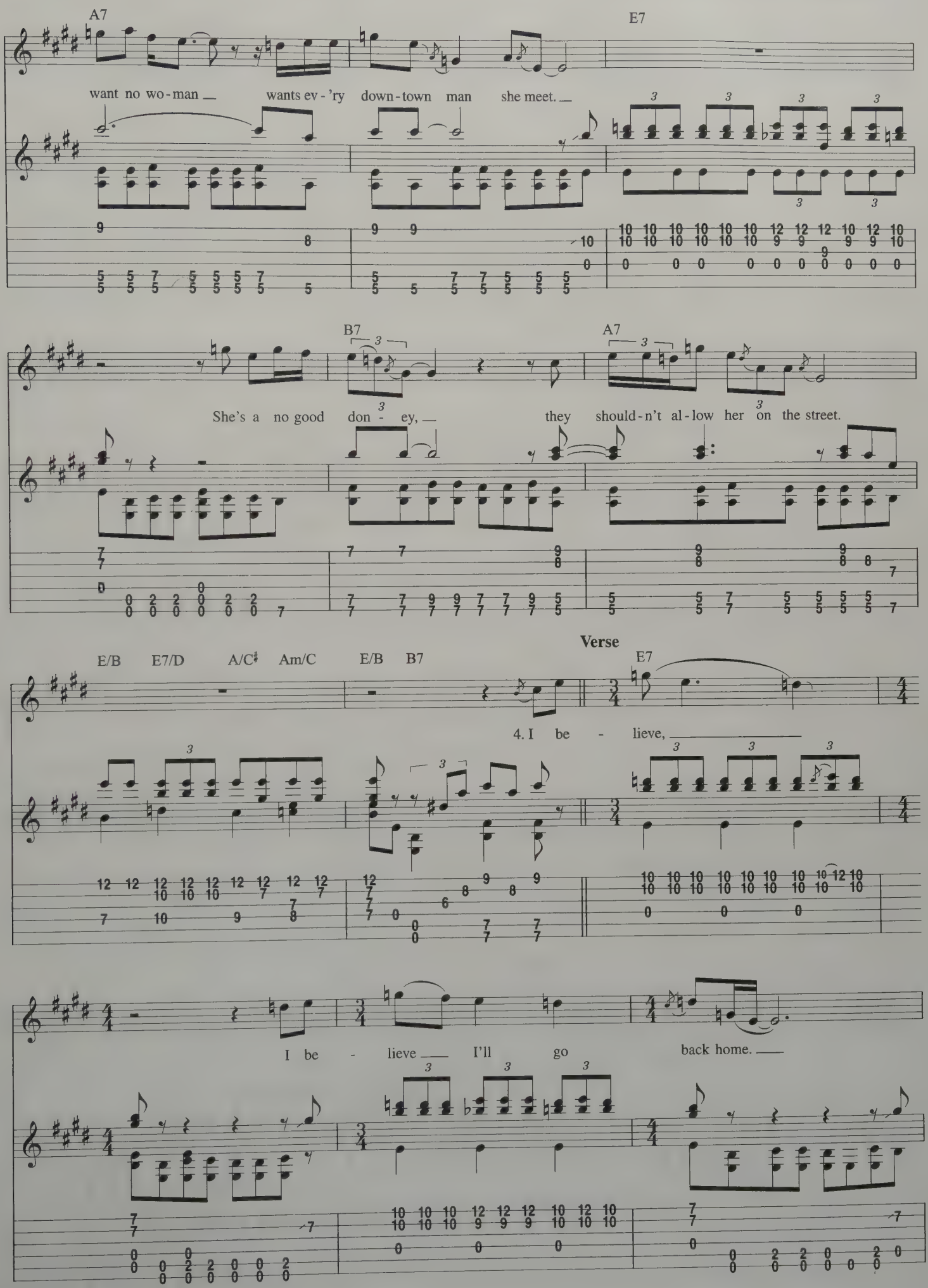
***Sung as even eighth notes.

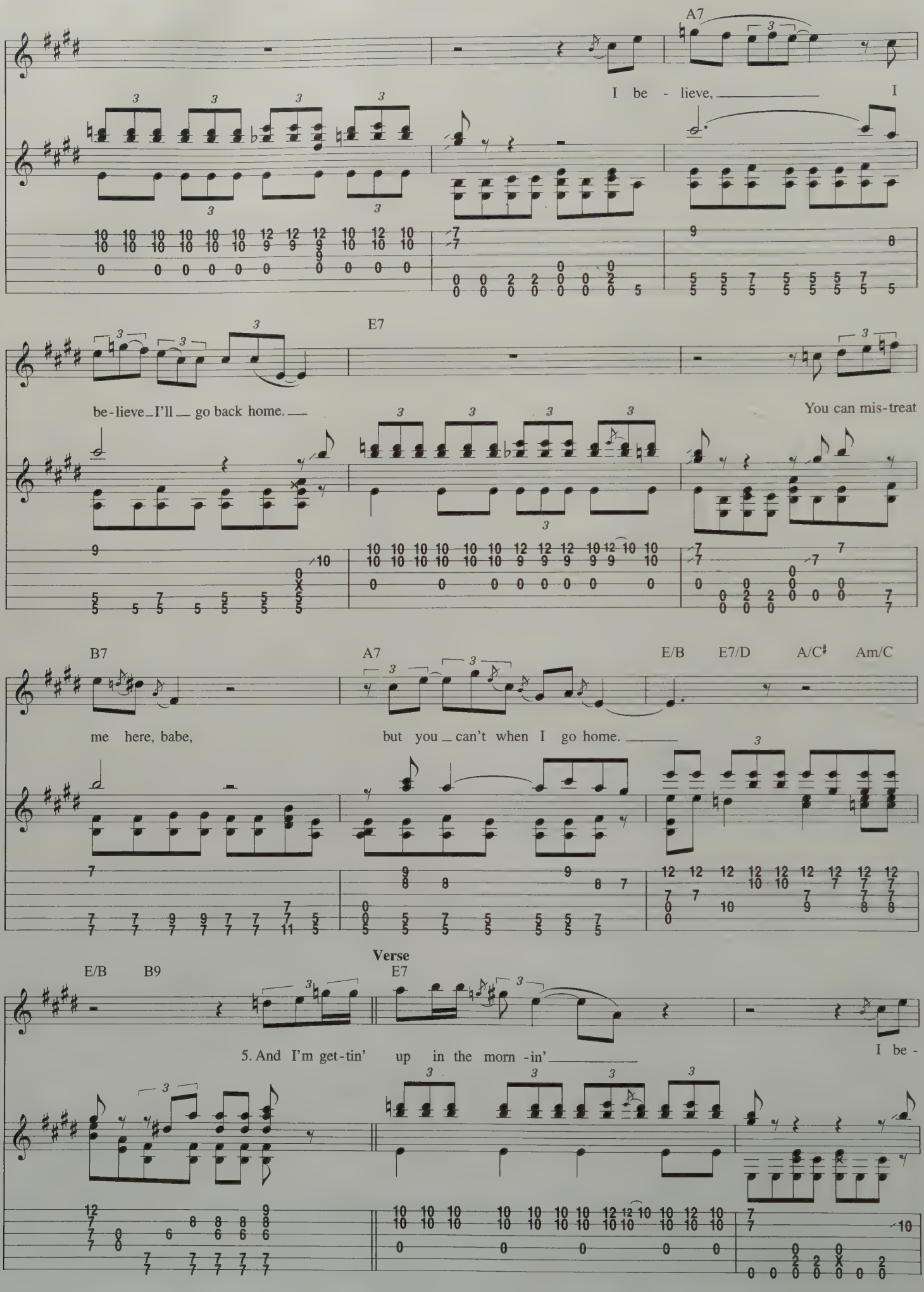
†downstemmed notes only, except during the turnarounds

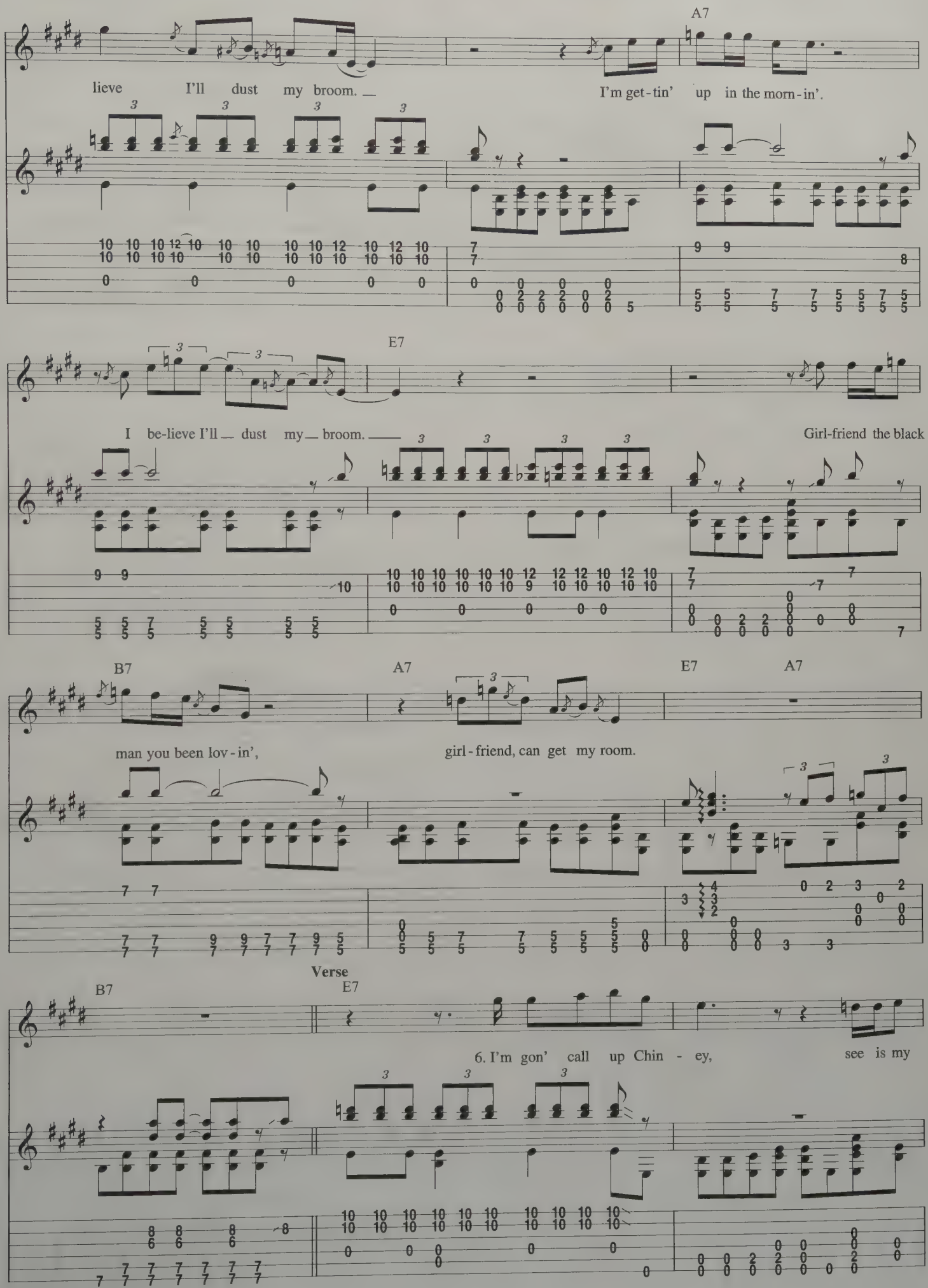
*Tunings were determined using the original 78s. To play along with the *Robert Johnson – The Complete Recordings* CD set, Capo I.

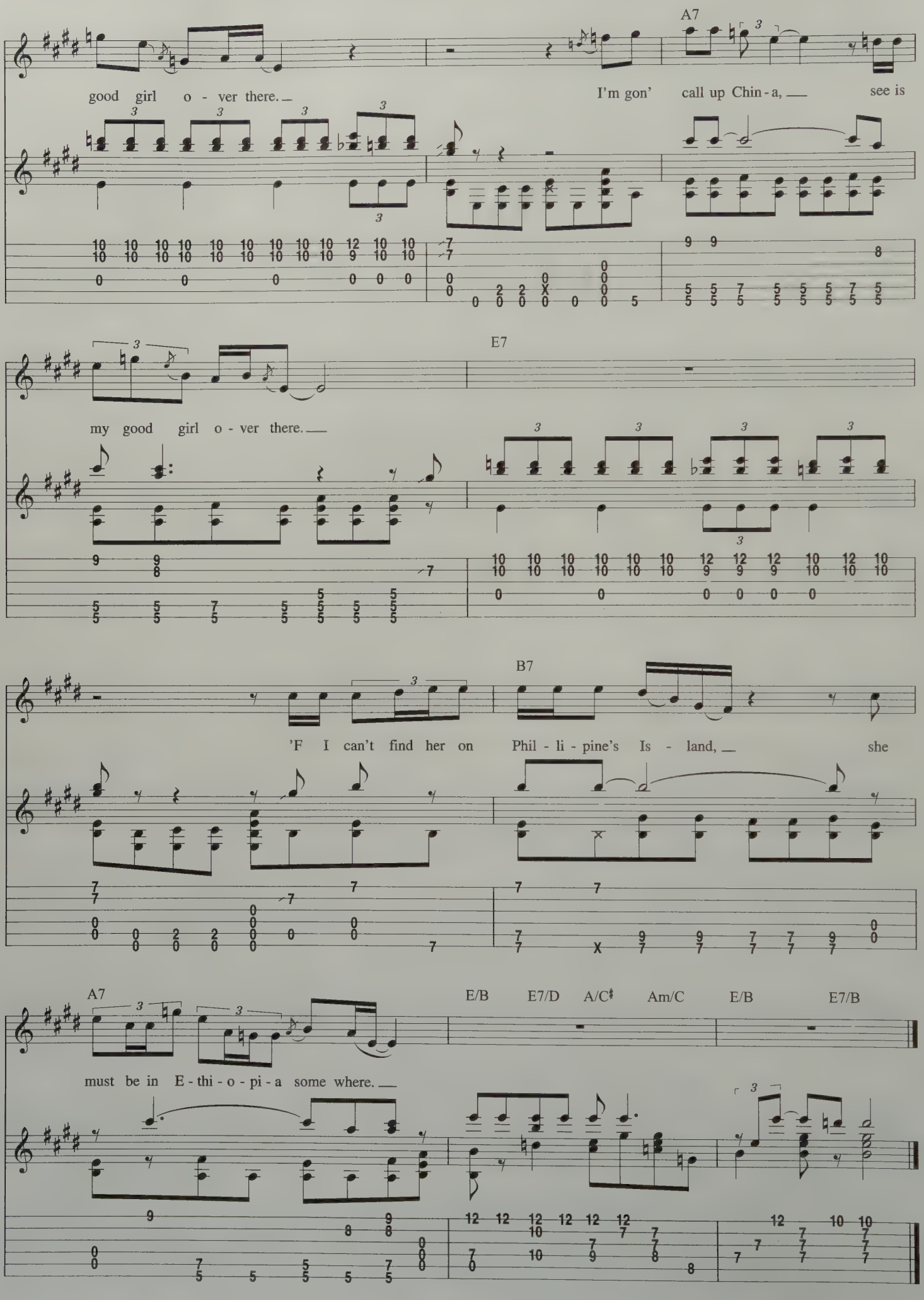

E7
B7
Girl - friend, the black man you been
A7
E/B
E7/D
A/C♯
Am/C
lov - in',
girl - friend, can get my room.
*sung behind the beat
Verse
E/B
B9
*E7
2. I'm gon' write a let - ter,
tel - e - phone
A7
ev -'ry town I know.
I'm gon' write a let - ter,


E7
tel - e - phone ev - 'ry town I know.
B7
A7
If I can't find her in West Hel - 'na, she must be in East Mon - roe, I know.
Verse
E E7/D A/C♯ Am/C E/B B9
E7
3. I don't want no wom - an wants ev - 'ry
down - town man she meet.
I don't


A7
E7
want no wo-man
wants ev-'ry down-town man she meet.
B7
A7
She's a no good don-ey,
they should-n't al-low her on the street.
Verse
E/B E7/D A/C♯ Am/C E/B B7
E7
4. I be - lieve,
I be - lieve I'll go back home.


A7
I be - lieve,
I
E7
be-lieve I'll go back home.
You can mis-treat
B7
A7
E/B
E7/D
A/C♯
Am/C
me here, babe,
but you can't when I go home.
Verse
E/B
B9
E7
5. And I'm get-tin' up in the morn-in'
I be -


A7
lieve I'll dust my broom.
I'm get-tin' up in the morn-in'.
E7
I be-lieve I'll dust my broom.
Girl-friend the black
B7
A7
E7
A7
man you been lov-in',
girl-friend, can get my room.
Verse
B7
E7
6. I'm gon' call up Chin - ey,
see is my


A7
good girl o - ver there.
I'm gon' call up Chin - a,
see is
E7
my good girl o - ver there.
B7
'F I can't find her on Phil - li - pine's Is - land,
she
A7
must be in E - thi - o - pi - a some where.
E/B
E7/D
A/C♯
Am/C
E/B
E7/B

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I'm Gonna Yola My Blues Away

Lonnie Johnson
Life Saver Blues

Robert Johnson
Cross Road Blues
I Believe I'll Dust My Broom

Hambone Willie Newbern
Roll and Tumble Blues

Charley Patton
You Gonna Need Someone When You Die

Johnnie Temple
Lead Pencil Blues

Peetie Wheatstraw
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